

CONSUMER MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

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March 2014

# Wanderlust

**Revealed!**

The winners of  
Wanderlust Travel  
Photo of the Year  
p112

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## THE TEAM

And what they've been up to this month?

**PHOEBE SMITH**

◆ EDITOR ◆

Pulling on her cycling shorts and exploring Lake Constance

**SEE PAGE 70****SARAH BAXTER**

◆ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ◆

Getting hard-heeled travel envy from India's Sahyadris

**SEE PAGE 98****TOM HAWKER**

◆ PRODUCTION EDITOR ◆

Is now properly sold on Guatemala. Shame he can't afford to buy it

**SEE PAGE 26****ALEX GREGG**

◆ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ◆

Getting serious wanderlust researching our Get Active special

**SEE PAGE 81****Blazing paddles**

Kayak when you travel and you'll be so stunned by the scenery you won't notice the exercise

# Welcome



"LET'S GET PHYSICAL!" Although New Year now seems an age away, how many of you resolved to get fit this year? If you did, you'll find a bunch of inspirational ideas for getting active on your travels in this issue, from climbing a volcano in Guatemala (p26) to cycling the circumference of Europe's Lake Constance (ticking off three countries as you pedal!).

One of my resolutions is always to improve my photography – usually brought on by being one of the judging panel of the Wanderlust Photo of the Year Competition. Yet again, it was both a pleasure and a torment to whittle 8,000 photos down to just 40! You'll find the superb photographs that did make it over the next few pages and on p112.

And if you want to learn to take better photos yourself, do keep an eye on [www.wanderlustjourneys.co.uk](http://www.wanderlustjourneys.co.uk) for our acclaimed workshops and seminars. It was a pleasure to meet so many of you at the recent UK travel shows and seminars, and I hope we've helped inspire you.

**LYN HUGHES**

Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

## WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

Subscribers now get a special and exclusive cover that showcases our great travel photography. Picked us up on the newsstand? You'll notice we're now *Wanderlust Travel* – the same award-winning content as the subscriber edition, but now with a great new look.



**Wanderlust**  
consumer magazine of the year

**PPA** independent publisher awards 2013  
winner



## SUBSCRIBE TO WANDERLUST & RECEIVE A FREE £50 VOUCHER

See p40 for details

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For people with a passion for travel

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In memory of co-founder & publisher Paul Morrison

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### US DISTRIBUTION

Wanderlust, ISSN 1351-4733, is published monthly except Dec/Jan and Jul/Aug combined issues and is distributed in the USA by Pitney Bowes International Mailing Services Inc as mailing agent. Periodicals postage paid at Kearny, NJ and additional mailing offices.

### CONTRIBUTIONS & WORK EXPERIENCE

For details please go to  
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### Newtrade distribution

COMAG Specialist: 01895 433800

Footnotes maps Digital Mapping (Tel: 02920 912192)

Office camera Nikon D80

Video camera Sony DCR-SR72

Office binoculars Swarovski EL 8x32s

Staff travel insurance InsureandGo

## This issue was brought to you in part by....



### KARL PILKINGTON

Typically grouchy TV traveller

This issue reluctant traveller Karl talks strange food and getting culture shock in India (p18)

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

I'd say people would say I'm like a desert. Bit boring with not much going on.

### First great travel experience?

It has to be India in series one of *An Idiot Abroad*.

I really didn't know what had hit me. It wasn't great but I really felt like I was miles away from home. Everyone should witness the madness of that place if they can.

### Favourite journey?

It was probably that first trip to India. I really wasn't happy at the time and I got quite sick as well, but I won't forget how much it messed with my head.

### Top five journeys worldwide?

Rome; Cornwall; Barcelona; Bits of Wales; New Zealand.

### Passport stamp you're proudest of / want to get

Not too fussed. I've got through quite a few passports. There's never enough pages in them.

I think there's more pages in those *Mr Men* books for kids.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

I normally nip into a Ripley's Believe It or Not! museum if one is close by.



### ALEX HOWARTH

Physiotherapist & mountain man

Dr Jane's son Alex has been helping us all limber up to climb Kili and other iconic high mountains in our special Masterclass (p56)

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

It's got to be mountains. They provide the perfect balance of tranquillity and exhilaration.

### First great travel experience?

I grew up in Nepal and I've always been amazed by the contrast between the Himalayas, the jungle and the planes. I try to get back as often as possible.

### Favourite journey?

Trekking to Kangchenjunga base camp, we were diverted by waist-deep snow and storms but ended up in a stunning high-altitude magnolia forest.

### Top five journeys worldwide?

Nepal; Iceland; Slovenia; Swaziland; Mozambique.

### Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Nepal.

### Passport stamp you would most like to have?

Madagascar.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

Long walks in the mountains munching on *lapsi*, a local sweet-but-sharp dried fruit.



### GRAHAM HUGHES

One man, every country, no planes

Record-breaking traveller Graham (who has holds a Guinness World Record for visiting 201 countries overland), has been debating if travel should be quality over quantity. (p14)

### Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you?

Desert.

### First great travel experience?

When I was a kid we used to go on camping holidays in Europe in a camper van – it always felt like a great adventure. So in the summer of 1990, when I was just 11 years old and the Berlin Wall had come down, it was the first time in my lifetime that you could actually travel without any visas to East Germany. That was the journey that really cemented my wanderlust. I've still got my piece of the Berlin Wall.

### Favourite journey?

The Odyssey Expedition.

### Top five journeys worldwide?

Palau; Bolivia; Madagascar; Iran; Thailand.

### Passport stamp you're proudest of?

South Sudan.

### Passport stamp you would most like to have?

Nauru. I spent four days there and didn't get a stamp.

### Guilty travel pleasure?

Wet wipes.

## Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual Awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.



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TEXAS



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Issue 144  
March 2014



## ■ Cover Stories

**81 Sights! Camera! Action!**  
**ACTIVE TRAVEL SPECIAL** Dive vibrant reefs, wander up mountain ranges, mush with huskies or horseride on a ranch. Whether you're an adventure novice or a seasoned adrenaline junkie, we track down the most exhilarating ways to explore the planet's freshest destinations

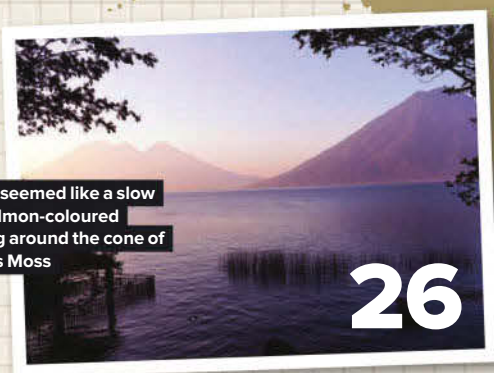
**112 Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year 2013**  
The UK's biggest travel photo competition closes for another year, with over 8,000 entries being painfully narrowed down to just 40 finalists. Check them out – and find out who won – right here...

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📍 Guatemala, p26





# BE A FLIGHT ATTENDANT WITH...

## Heather Poole, p59



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# 360°



V i e w f i n d e r

PEOPLE  
WINNER



## CAREFUL, BROTHER... Bagbazar, Kolkata, India

Photographer: Sandipan Mukherjee

This issue we showcase the finalists and winners in the *Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year* competition – starting with this, the winner of our people category. Sandipan's distinctive shot captured a small moment of local life.

He says: "Travellers to the city may still seek out vestiges of the Kolkata of yore in the labyrinthine streets of Bagbazar. In some quaint little alley, one may even chance upon an itinerant *kaan-saaf-wallah* (ear-cleaner), armed with his strange array of tools, attending to a terrified customer."

See the rest of the *Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year* winners – and find out who won the other categories – on p112









ICON  
WINNER

**PONT ALEXANDRE III**  
Paris, France

Photographer: **Ulrich Lambert**

The Eiffel Tower illuminates the Paris night sky in this brilliantly composed shot, taken from the Alexandre III Bridge.

This shot was the worthy winner of the *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year Icon category, showing a much celebrated destination in a whole new – and rather glamorous – light.

See all the winners on p112



PORTFOLIO  
WINNER



## NYC SUBWAY 13:49

New York City, US

Photographer: **Renny Whitehead**

The *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year judges were utterly energised by this remarkable portfolio of images from Renny Whitehead. "The New York City subway contains a truly eclectic mix of people and characters, mostly strangers in one of the biggest cities on earth," says Renny. "These moments, a few minutes at most, can represent rare moments of peace while cars roar on the streets above and trains thunder by all around."

See the rest of the shortlisted Portfolio entries at [www.wanderlust.co.uk/144](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/144)









■ Readers' Pictures

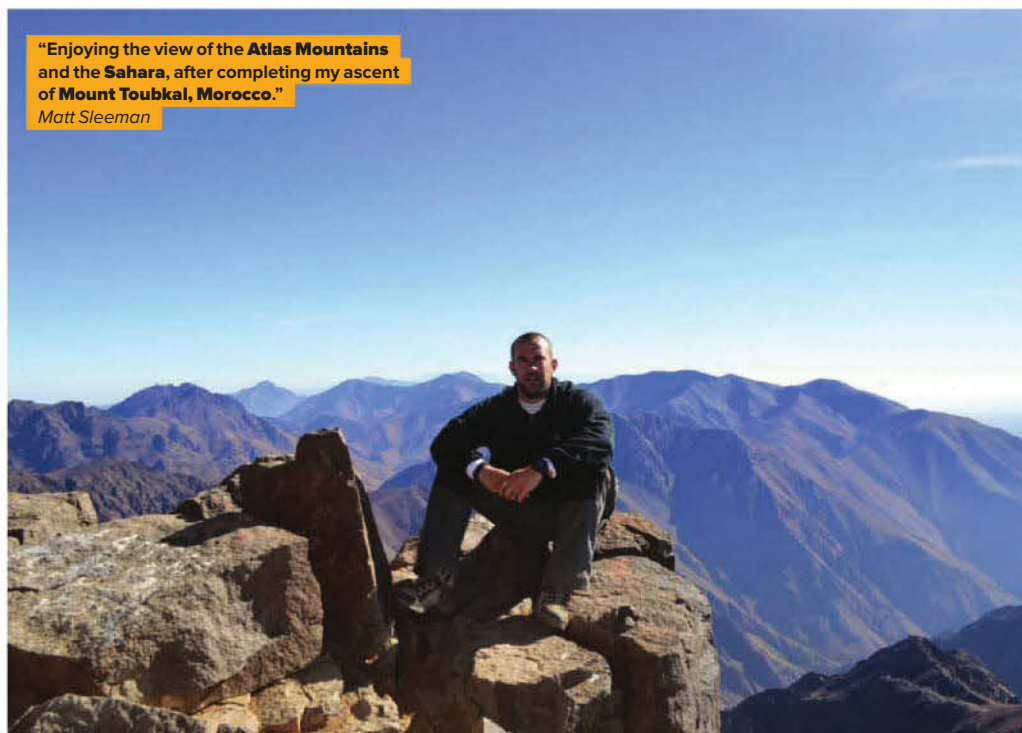
# YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email [fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk) – make us jealous!

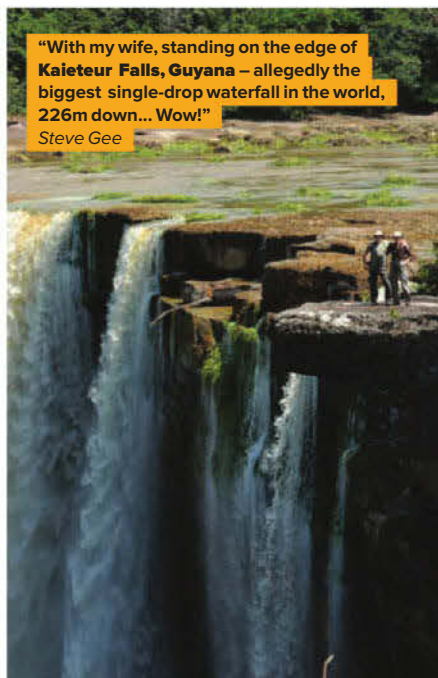
"Enjoying the view of the **Atlas Mountains** and the **Sahara**, after completing my ascent of **Mount Toubkal, Morocco**."

*Matt Sleeman*



"With my wife, standing on the edge of **Kaieteur Falls, Guyana** – allegedly the biggest single-drop waterfall in the world, 226m down... Wow!"

*Steve Gee*



"Undertaking a four-day charity trek in the **Mount Mulanje Massif, southern Malawi**, with an amazing view out over **Mozambique**."

*Maddie Amos*

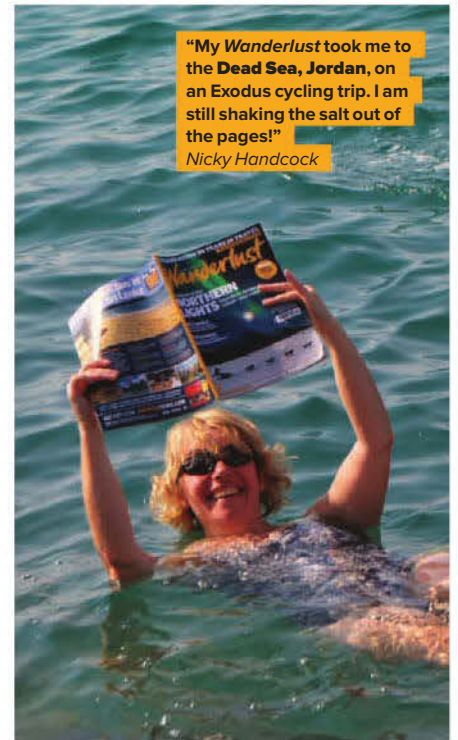




"Picking tea in the **Cameron Highlands, Malaysia** – the best cuppa we had all trip!"  
Sammy Radstone



"My *Wanderlust* took me to the **Dead Sea, Jordan**, on an Exodus cycling trip. I am still shaking the salt out of the pages!"  
Nicky Handcock



## Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your *Wanderlust* take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **Polar Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £23). But can you do better than Nicky (above)? We want to see where your *Wanderlust* takes you and where you take your *Wanderlust*!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag or email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



"Ice climbing on **Vatnajökull Glacier, Iceland**. We were covered in fog for most of the time but it lifted for about five minutes to give us this amazing view."  
Jill Naprstek



"Admiring the **Grand Canyon, USA**, from the North Rim."  
Louise Markus





# 12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your March essentials: budget flights to Bucharest, the best French fish stew, the big beggar debate, cherry blossom parties & more

## 1 ■ New Frontiers Your country count doesn't matter...

...or does it? With a new survey suggesting most people haven't visited that many we ask some of the world's most-travelled if it's about quality or quantity?

**O**ne hundred and ninety three. According to the UN, that's how many countries make up our planet (though other sources differ). And a recent survey by London City Airport found that the average UK resident has visited just seven of them.

You *Wanderlust* readers will doubtless have been to more; indeed, many of you might keep a conscious tally. But how important is it to go to lots of countries? Is travel more about quality than quantity?

"Quality is always preferred," says adventurer Gunnar Garfors (garfors.com). The Norwegian, who in 2013 completed his mission to visit every country, says, if possible, he prefers to travel around when he reaches a destination to make it count: "To only visit one place never gives justice to the full country." While he confesses to participating in the "madness" of list-ticking, he says it's not about that: "Of course I had to visit every country to achieve my goal, but it was never about ticking it off. I wanted to experience something."

**'To only visit one place never gives justice to the full country'**

Some members of California's Travelers' Century Club (TCC) would disagree. It's all about the quantity. According to chairman Klaus Billep, if you set foot in one city (eg New York), you can tick off the whole country (USA); if your plane stops to refuel, that country counts too – even if you don't disembark. 'Visit' 100 of the TCC's 321 listed territories and you can join the elite club.

Completing a ticklist was the goal for Graham Hughes, who holds the Guinness World Record for visiting 201 countries in four years (theodysseyexpedition.com): "Whether it's wall plates or Pokémon cards, people get a kick out of getting the complete set." In some countries – such as Panama and Pakistan – he only stepped over the border then left.

Gunnar argues there's more to seeing somewhere than simply touching soil: "I make a list, but it was still about the experiences, memories, people, smells, tastes and views." Rushing around list ticking lots of countries or really getting under the skin of fewer? We know what we'd choose. How about you?



Graham Hughes





**Record-breaking roaming** Graham Hughes is the first person to have visited 201 countries travelling overland

## ■ The Nitty Gritty Confessions of a list-ticker



**Charles Veley** is the founder of list-ticking network mosttravelledpeople.com. He has travelled

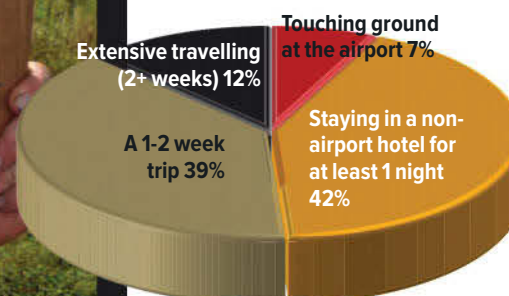
to 829 of the 874 countries, territories, autonomous regions, enclaves, geographically separated island groups, and major states and provinces that the site defines.

"I started [making a list] in 2001, after spending a year on the road," he explains. "I enjoy having a list as a source of ideas, and as a basis for meticulous planning. On the day, however, the plan will inevitably go out the window and in that case, the meticulous planning will result in better spontaneous decisions."

He picks quality over quantity, but adds: "Quantity builds quality. More experienced travellers – travellers who've been to more places – typically know how to discover authentic local experiences quickly."

For the purpose of Charles's list, a 'visit' involves crossing a border and standing with both feet on land. For islands where landing is forbidden, you only need to touch a portion of the island above the waterline. There's no minimum visit time either. Plane refuelling doesn't count though: "Without passing through immigration a person has not legally arrived in a country. Time spent in an airport lounge, or furtively dashing across a remote border area and back again, does not meet the common sense test for visits."

■ Online reader poll  
We asked you: what is your criterion for ticking a country off your list?





New Routes

## GO NOW...

**City surprise**  
Delve deeper to find the charms of downtown Bucharest



2

## Make a budget bid for Bucharest

**Why go?**

Bucharest gets a lot of flak. To the uninitiated it can appear a past-its-best city of limited appeal, plagued by overcharging cabbies, woeful traffic and feral dogs. Dig deeper though, and patience will be rewarded. The Romanian capital is in fact a mélange of overlapping cultures, with dashes of communist, medieval, French and more mixed together to form a surprisingly cosmopolitan metropolis.

This spring, new direct Ryanair flights from Stansted to Otopeni Airport, 16.5km north-west of Bucharest, will make getting to this mish-mash city cheap as chips. Hop aboard to access sprawling streets and countless cafés, immaculate parks and the country's best museums. Must-sees include Cişmigiu Gardens, 17 hectares of parkland with an artificial lake; the Romanian Athenaeum, a 19th-century concert hall with gold-painted ceilings and

pink marble columns; and Ceauşescu's gargantuan (and unfinished) Palace of the Parliament, the world's second-largest building after the Pentagon. Or head 40km north to Snagov Monastery – Dracula's alleged resting place.

**Where to stay?**

The spacious, recently refurbished Park Studio is close to Cişmigiu Gardens. From £30pn for up to three people (housetrip.com).

**Get there now!**

Ryanair (ryanair.com) will fly London Stansted-Bucharest Otopeni from 30 March; from £26.99 one way.

**Or how about this...**

British Airways' new 787 Dreamliner will fly direct five times a week from Heathrow to Austin-Bergstrom from 3 March – the first regular transatlantic air service to the Texan city. From £509 return; britishairways.com.

Travel Gear

### 3 BUY THIS...

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handmade on the edge of the Amazon from recycled truck tarpaulins; their distressed look comes from the exposure to rain, sun and dust the tarp endured in its former life on the road, making each one totally unique.

Languages

### 4 LEARN THIS...

**DK 15-minute Mandarin Chinese and Arabic**  
£14, [www.dk.com](http://www.dk.com)



What you can do in 15 minutes? Eat breakfast, shower, watch bad TV? How about learning a language instead? DK claims that by dedicating 15 minutes a day, five days a week, for 12 weeks, you'll know enough to read signs and menus and get on with the locals. New language packs for 2014 include Mandarin Chinese and Arabic.

Television

### 5 RECORD THIS...

**Monkey Planet**  
BBC1, March TBC



No, this isn't a post-modern take on the Charlton Heston classic, but rather George McGavin's exploration of our closest animal cousins – lemurs, monkeys and apes. McGavin travels around the globe, investigating life within the family, how they survive together and just how familiar they really are to us damn dirty humans.





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■ Five minutes with...

6

# KARL PILKINGTON REALLY DOES LIKE TRAVEL

Ricky Gervais once teased him for being uncultured, but Karl Pilkington has now turned reluctant travel guru. Can he reach us the *The Moaning of Life*?

## Travel is said to broaden your horizons. Has it changed you as a person?

I'm physically knackered. My back has been hammered. My L5/S1 in my spine is a bit crushed from doing a land dive in Vanuatu so you could say I kind of did broaden my mind.... by landing on it. I think it has made me see life differently. It's impossible to do and see all the stuff I have seen without it changing the way I see things.

## How do you think Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant would have coped in the situations you've been forced into?

They wouldn't have handled it. Ricky does his nut if his fishcakes are cold so I can't see him tucking into a camel's testicle like I did in Egypt. That was served quite cold... but is that how they're supposed to be served?

## Should you travel fully informed or embrace serendipity and surprise?

Travel uninformed, as then you'll have low expectations. I went to Rome years ago and all the guidebooks suggested going to see the fancy ceiling that Michelangelo did. It was like a Boxing Day sale at John Lewis, just loads of pushing and shoving and noise. Soon as something has made it into a guidebook for being special it is ruined by crowds of people.

**'Ricky does his nut if his fishcakes are cold so I can't see him tucking into a camel's testicle'**

## Where in the world would you most like to live?

I'm always happy to get back home so it must be Britain. As much as everyone who lives here moans about it, it's still pretty good compared to a lot of places in the world. I've found that after a while you see a lot of similarities no matter where you are. Everyone is the same all over the world. I was with a tribe who used frog sweat to get off their head whereas we use Bargain Booze, which gives the same end result. I'm telling you, we're all the same.

## Would you prefer to go somewhere new or revisit the places you loved?

Somewhere different, otherwise you'll keep comparing your trip with the last time you were there. Keep the memories of the time you enjoyed it fresh and uncluttered. Another good thing to do is to go somewhere horrible so that you are really glad to get back home.

## What's the most unusual thing you've eaten abroad?

I've had all sorts. Crickets, toad, ant eggs, lamb testicles, dog, rhino poo. None of it had any

nasty effect and yet when I'm at home I only have to have a pie and I have to swig on Gaviscon as the pastry gives me heartburn. Ant eggs don't have that effect on me.

## Is space the final frontier or are there better things to spend £125,000 on?

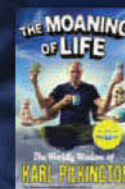
I don't know why it's that expensive as space isn't that far away. It's only about 68 miles; I used to drive 70 miles to Deal for the odd weekend and that costs £15 for fuel there and back. Also it wouldn't feel like you are really getting away from it all as you'll probably spend all the time looking out the window seeing if you can see your house.

## Where is on your travel wishlist?

There isn't a place I want to go but I plan on seeing a starling murmuration. I like watching a video on YouTube of one of these with Bill Oddie. It's when thousands of starlings are whizzing about making odd shapes. I just need to find somewhere that doesn't have crowds of people filming it on their phones instead of just watching it with their eyes.

## And anywhere in the world you never want to visit?

Legoland. I just don't fancy it.



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■ World Food

# EAT THIS...



# 7

## Why we want to slurp in southern France

A lot of heart should be mixed into authentic French dishes to make them a success. Well that's according to chef and baker Sébastien Boudet, whose new book, *The French Baker*, serves up a tribute to his country's culinary techniques and traditions – from artisan breads and to-die-for desserts to mains full of flavour and fragrance.

Boudet journeys around France, cooking up cultural favourites such as the perfect quiche lorraine and the silkiest brioche. But, with Ryanair just about to launch new flights from Edinburgh to the

Languedoc hub of Béziers (purportedly France's oldest city), it was his southern fishy dish that started to make our mouths water.

Originating in Marseille, east across the Gulf of Lion from Béziers, bouillabaisse is a traditional Provençal stew first made by fishermen from the catch they couldn't sell at market. Once a simple delicacy, it's now a luxury dish.

Traditionally bouillabaisse is made with fresh monkfish, John Dory, scorpion fish, red gurnard and mullet; sadly most of these species are now endangered. However, plenty of other types of seafood can be

used instead – as Sébastien suggests in his recipe. The mix of Provençal herbs and spices, and the way the broth is boiled, help give it its distinctive taste.

This hearty feast is best cooked in a cast-iron pot. Not only does the pot's rounded bottom make it perfect for simmering soups and stocks, but it looks great at a dinner party too. For a truly Marseillaise flavour, serve with crusty bread and *oursins* (sea urchins). Bon appétit!

**Edinburgh-Béziers flights with Ryanair launch 30 March.**

**From £35.99 one way; [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com).**



## BOUILLABAISSE

### Serves 12

2.5kg mixed fish (eg perch, walleye, haddock)  
12 mussels with shells  
Shells from 1-2 lobsters  
Shells from 6 langoustines  
1 orange  
200ml olive oil  
10 tomatoes, chopped  
2 heads of fennel, trimmed and chopped  
5 onions, chopped  
2 leeks, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped  
2 red chillies, finely chopped  
1 parsley plant, finely chopped  
4 bay leaves  
15 black peppercorns  
Sea salt  
4-5L water  
3 teaspoons saffron  
1kg peeled small potatoes

### Method

**1.** Peel the orange. Heat the olive oil in a cast-iron pot. At low heat, sauté tomatoes, fennel, onions, chillies and orange peel, plus all the spices except the saffron. Simmer for 15 minutes.

**2.** Clean, de-head and fillet all the fish before turning up the heat and adding the heads and fish to the pot; keep the fillet back. Simmer for a few mins, then add the water. Close the lid; simmer for 20-30 mins.

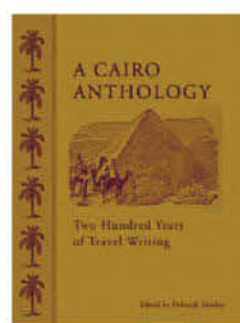
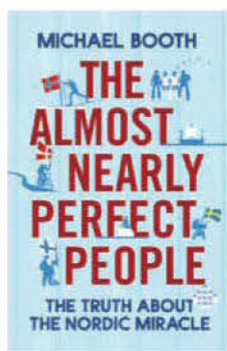
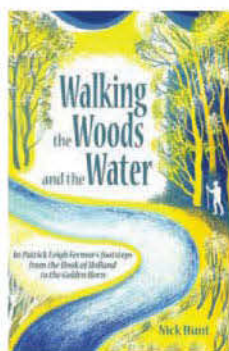
**3.** Remove the pot from the heat and blend the broth with a hand mixer. Strain the soup then add the saffron.

**4.** Bring the bouillabaisse to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for a few mins. Add the potatoes; simmer the soup at a low heat without the lid until the potatoes are almost soft.

**5.** Cut the fish fillets into pieces and add them, plus the mussels, lobster and langoustine shells, just before serving. The fillet should not be cooked in the broth and should only be poached slightly.

**Recipe from *The French Baker* by Sébastien Boudet (Skyhorse Publishing, £15)**





## 8 Read this... Europe is still full of surprises

### Do Patrick Leigh Fermor's Old Countries still exist?

Patrick Leigh Fermor left some big boots to fill. Sadly they were unavailable to Nick Hunt, whose own footwear is shredded by month seven of his 2011 Paddy-pilgrimage from Holland to Turkey, following Leigh Fermor's 1933 route. But where Paddy was entertained by some of Old Europe's grandest, Hunt now finds people battered by World War II, the Cold War and each other. It's in this recounting of relatively recent history that Hunt finds his own

feet, making *Walking the Woods and the Water* (Nicholas Brealey, £11; out 20 March) much more than a mash note.

Michael Booth is more interested in Europe's north. *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* (Jonathan Cape, £15) takes a warm look at a cold people, exploring the myths surrounding our Nordic pals – the high living standards, the liberal dullness, the insularity. Inevitably, they still come out of it looking great.

For something a little hotter, turn to the pocket-sized *A Cairo*

*Anthology* (The American University in Cairo Press, £12). Digesting 200 years' worth of travel writings – from Twain and Thackeray to Florence Nightingale – into one cute, if lightweight tome, it's perfect for the Egyptologist in your life.

Dinkier still are *The Hunt* guides (thehuntguides.com; from £16). This series picks out the best indie eateries and shops in a range of cities. Each is a handsome embellishment to – though not replacement for – your more standard city guide.

## 9 What's On UK EVENTS

### WILDERNESS LECTURES

Bristol, until 19 Mar  
www.wildernesslectures.com  
Chemistry Lecture Theatre/Victoria Rooms, University of Bristol. Single lecture entry from £8/8.50 adv/door; season tickets £90.

From action-packed adventurers to wild wanderers, Bristol's Wilderness Lectures series boasts a new line-up of speakers telling inspiring tales. Upcoming lectures include Charlie Speyer's 'One Man, One World, One Bike' (19 Feb), a recounting of the 20 months he spent cycling from Tasmania to the Shetlands, and 'Hoofing It Home' (19 Mar), Megan Lewis's story of horseriding 12,800km from the Great Wall to Great Britain to carry a message of goodwill from China ahead of the London 2012 Olympics.

### DISCOVERING UGANDA

London, 6 Mar  
020 7591 3100, www.rgs.org  
Royal Geographical Society (RGS), 1 Kensington Gore, SW7 2AR. 7pm. Tickets: £10 for members, £15 for non-members; includes wine and an info pack.

RGS' Discovering Uganda talk is ideal for first-timers keen to learn about the country's rich tapestry of culture, tribes and wilderness. You'll also get to meet and talk with experts, exhibitors and like-minded travellers and chat to them all about this landlocked East African gem.

### THE SEVEN HIGHEST SUMMITS

London, 15 Mar  
http://tinyurl.com/SevenHighestSummits

Kennedy Lecture Theatre, 30 Guildford St, London WC1N 1EH. 6pm. Tickets: £10; all proceeds go to The Nagajuna Trust (thenagajunatrust.org).

Intrepid mountaineer Tim Ralph explains how he conquered the Seven Summits – the highest peak on every continent. There will also be sponsored stands selling Tibetan jewellery and Nepalese trinkets. All money raised will go to the Nagajuna School, an orphanage in Nepal.

### CHESTER GLOBETROTTERS

Chester, 15 Mar  
01244 383392 / 629930  
www.chesterglobetrotters.co.uk  
25-27 Grosvenor St, Chester, CH1 2DD. 1pm. Entry: £3, refreshments included.

The March meeting of this travel club sees Marion Round talk about the many surprises that Ecuador and the Galápagos have to offer while Chris Holden dives into the deep history of the wreck of *The Royal Charter* – this 1859 maritime disaster is said to be one of the worst to have hit the Welsh coast.

## 10 The Big Debate

### Should you give to beggars?

## YES

Pam Haghighi,  
*Wanderlust* reader



"To get to where I go, I spend the sort of money that

could feed a family there for a year. There may well be a gang master who takes the majority of what's collected but some of it stays with the person who collected it. I guess, ultimately, I have to live with my conscience: I cannot eat comfortably if someone near me is hungry. I recognise how much dignity has to be lost to allow someone to beg and I believe we should help and not discriminate."

## NO

Luca Alfatti  
*Wanderlust World Guide*  
Award winner 2012



"No, giving encourages people to keep begging.

If you want to help, research the area you're travelling in – I guarantee there will be someone who is working hard somewhere to improve the lives of the ones in need. Almost everywhere I've taken groups to, there's been an organisation – Mumbai, Rio, Nairobi, or the project in Guatemala (Manos Amigas), which received the bursary I won from *Wanderlust*."

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Instant Expert

# KNOW YOUR... CHERRY BLOSSOMS

**Pretty passage**  
Float through a tunnel of trees on the Meguro River in Tokyo



11

Nowhere does spring bloom quite like it – here's how to see Japan's signature tree in full flower

**T**he start of spring can only mean one thing – a sea of cherry blossom is starting to wash across Japan, fleetingly covering the country in delicate buds. These fragile flowers only last about two weeks – but there are few sights more magical.

## Why is it so special?

The *sakura* (cherry blossom) is the de facto national flower of Japan. The Japanese see the trees' brief bloom as a symbol of the impermanence of life. They pay homage to the flower at *hanami* – blossom-watching parties – where they eat, drink and dance beneath the branches.

## When can I see it?

The Japan National Tourism Organization tracks the progress of the cherry blossom

and produces a forecast ([www.jnto.go.jp/sakura/eng/index.php](http://www.jnto.go.jp/sakura/eng/index.php)). Although 2014 dates have not yet been released, you can get an idea by looking back at previous years.

The buds burst first in Japan's southern subtropical Okinawa Islands, in January. They begin to open on the island of Kyushu by mid-March; the first blooms hit Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka (on Honshu) late March/early April. The latest flowering is on northerly Hokkaido in early May.

## TOP TIP

Despite the Japanese love of the cherry blossom, the trees are rarely grown in private gardens – only in parks. This is mainly due to their lack of four-season beauty.

## Where can I see it?

The sakura appears across the nation, but some spots are better than others. Kyoto is a good place to see the blooms, which drape the city's abundant shrines (such as calming Heian-jingu) and parks; head to Maruyama-Koen to sit beneath a beautiful pink canopy.

The castle town of Hirosaki holds the Sakura Matsuri festival, while mountainous Yoshinoyama is home to more than 30,000 cherry trees. In Tokyo, witness brilliant blooms in Inokashira and Ueno parks.

## What else should I do in Japan in spring?

Gaze at 3,776m Mount Fuji; spring isn't the season to climb it (that's best July-August) but this solitary peak looks best from afar. View it while getting pruned in an *onsen* (hot spring) in Hakone. Another good onsen choice is Unzen, on Kyushu's Lake Suwa-ko – the waters are lined with cherry trees.

Take a tour of the capital, including the Tokyo National Museum, Ueno Zoo and a paddle past the blooms of Kitanomaru Park. Also, visit the big bronze Buddha of Kamakura and stroll through cherry blossom tunnels along Nagoya's Yamazaki River.



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A number of tours also feature MasterChef contestants, with the inaugural MasterChef Travel tour to Marrakech featuring *MasterChef: The Professionals* 2012 joint winner **Kerri Moss**, departing on 25 March 2014. The 5-day trip is priced from **only £1,395** per person.

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James Nathan – Vietnam	Ash Mair – Spain
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Be Inspired

# THE BEST SLOOOOW TRIPS



1



9



8



7



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4



5



6

**A**nd relax... This may be our active issue, but seeing as the modern world can be oh-so-hecktic, we thought we'd show you some alternative ways to use your annual leave. That doesn't mean flopping on a beach – there are loads of great slow-paced trips that allow you to unwind and still have an adventure. From lazy floats down wildlife-hugged rivers to tasty stays on chocolate plantations, there's a leisurely trip for every type of traveller.

## PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: [mytripfinder.co.uk](http://mytripfinder.co.uk)

## 1. Laos

### Board a slow boat

Link two travel faves on **TravelLocal's** *Slow Boat to Laos* trip. Begin in the Thai city of Chiang Rai, famed for its Buddhist temples and night bazaar, before boarding the *Luang Say* to begin the slow, meandering two-day cruise along the Mekong to Luang Prabang. Once in Laos, relaxed excursions to the languid 4,000 Islands (Si Phan Don) and an elephant ride on the little-visited Bolaven Plateau round off this leisurely voyage.

**Who:** Travel Local (01865 242709, [www.travellocal.com](http://www.travellocal.com))

**When:** Tailormade

**How long:** 12 nights

**How much:** from £1,595 (excl flights)

## 2. Italy

### Taste life among the lemon groves

Savour the rustic *dolce vita* on **G Adventures' Local Living Sorrento**. Stay on a working organic lemon farm, a short walk from the picturesque Amalfi Coast. Wake each morning to the zesty farm-fresh air, before heading off on a range of slow-paced activities, from pizza-making demonstrations to a guided history walk of Pompeii. Don't forget to try the farm's homemade limoncello – delicious!

**Who:** G Adventures (0844 272 0000, [www.gadventures.com](http://www.gadventures.com))

**When:** Set dates, Jun-Oct

**How long:** 7 days

**How much:** from £899 (excl flights)



### 3. Austria

#### Try traditional lakeside living

Ambling more than rambling is the ethos of **Adagio's** *The Austrian Lake District* tour. Based in the traditional lakeside village of Alatussee, this rejuvenating break includes tours into the surrounding hills, a boat trip to Kamersee Lake and a cable car to the Dachstein Ice Caves.

**Who:** Adagio (01707 386700, [www.adagio.co.uk](http://www.adagio.co.uk))

**When:** 15 & 22 Jun, 31 Aug, 7 Sept 2014

**How long:** 8 days

**How much:** from £1,299 (incl flights)

### 4. Madagascar

#### Relax in a wildlife paradise

A super slow safari awaits on **Audley Hidden Beaches'** *Madagascar* trip. Anjajavy is in a private nature reserve: spot colourful lovebirds while swinging in a hammock and hit the beach for great snorkelling and kayaking. Also, venture to Andasibe-Mantadia NP for sightings of sifaka, cat-like fossa and more.

**Who:** Audley Hidden Beaches (01993 838250, [www.hiddenbeaches.co.uk](http://www.hiddenbeaches.co.uk))

**When:** Tailormade

**How long:** 10 nights

**How much:** from £3,874 (incl flights)

### 5. India

#### Float around Kashmir like a king

Relax in India on **Wild Frontiers'** *Kashmir: Garden of the Moghul Kings* tour. Slowly drift in wooden *shikaras* from Dal Lake to a remote camp at Manasbal, following a watery trail first plied by Moghul rulers in the 17th century. Also, stay on a houseboat in Srinagar, walk in the Himalayan foothills and visit the snowy hill station of Gulmarg.

**Who:** Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, [www.wildfrontierstravel.com](http://www.wildfrontierstravel.com))

**When:** 12 Jun, 31 Aug 2014

**How long:** 11 days

**How much:** from £1,850 (excl flights)

### 6. Channel Islands

#### Discover the UK's most peaceful place

Retreat to the smallest and quietest of the Channel Islands on **Channel Islands Direct's** *Herm Short Break*. Herm has no cars and no bikes; its only hotel has no TVs, clocks or phones in the bedrooms – this is a complete break from the 21st century. Spend days walking along the

white sands of Shell Beach and sinking ales in the Mermaid, the island's only pub.

**Who:** Channel Islands Direct (08444 937095, [channelislandsdirect.co.uk](http://channelislandsdirect.co.uk))

**When:** Tailormade

**How long:** 3 nights

**How much:** from £379 (incl flights)

### 7. Ecuador

#### Take a wild cruise down the Amazon

All aboard for **Tribes'** new *Ecuadorian Amazon Cruise*, an intrepid voyage down the Napo River. The *Anakonda* is one of only two boats cruising the Ecuadorian Amazon, giving a rare opportunity to see this unexplored jungle. It's a luxury boat: its 18 suites have floor-to-ceiling windows, so you can observe wildlife from the comfort of your own bed. Guided walks, canoe rides and community visits take you even further into the forest.

**Who:** Tribes (01473 890499, [www.tribes.co.uk](http://www.tribes.co.uk))

**When:** Tailormade

**How long:** 4 days

**How much:** from £1,215 (excl flights)

### 8. St Lucia

#### Indulge in chocolate!

On **Steppes Travel's** *St Lucia* tour you'll stay on a working cocoa plantation, in rustic-chic lodges: it smells glorious. The food's good too: from line-caught tuna with cacao pesto to St Lucian choc tart. Work it all off with walks along nature trails, a visit to the Botanical Gardens and snorkelling in the balmy Caribbean.

**Who:** Steppes Travel (0845 0756 079, [www.steppestravel.co.uk](http://www.steppestravel.co.uk))

**When:** Tailormade

**How long:** 12 days

**How much:** from £2,445 (incl flights)

### 9. Turkey

#### Sail the lovely Lycian Coast

**Exodus' Gulet Cruise** combines discovery with relaxation. You'll drift along the Lycian Coast on a traditional Turkish *gulet*, snorkelling, lounging and disembarking for excursions – to 300m-deep Saklikent Gorge, Myra's Roman theatre and beaches aplenty.

**Who:** Exodus (0845 287 7411, [www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk))

**When:** Departures May-Oct 2014

**How long:** 8 days

**How much:** from £899 (incl flights)

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# GETTING **ACTIVE** AMONG THE **VOLCANOES**

Guatemala's Lago de Atitlán is so much more than a beautiful body of water – spend at least a week hiking, kayaking and cycling around it for a full immersion in modern Mayan life

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **CHRIS MOSS**









#### Lava-ley view

Guide Héctor eyes up Volcán Tolimán volcano and the Cerro de Oro; (left) Coffee and cloth-weaving are two key industries for those living around Atitlán

**T**o be completely honest, I didn't feel like hiking up Volcán San Pedro. While strolling around San Juan la Laguna, the 3,020m cone loomed over me somewhat menacingly. The sky was overcast. It was 7am. I'd spent the night in a homestay and had only slept for about five hours. Breakfast had been a tiny muffin and a cup of instant coffee – hardly preparation for a hard climb.

But then mountain guide Héctor Rogelio Puac arrived on a boat. I had to make a decision. He wolfed down breakfast and somehow I found myself following him – he was small, wiry and fast – around San Juan as he bought bread, bananas, drinks and chocolate.

Pride, or some alpha-male thing, got the better of me. Or perhaps it was the power of the place: I was spending a week on Lago de Atitlán, a big, beautiful crater lake surrounded by volcanoes. If I couldn't conquer at least one of its handsome cones, I didn't belong here.

## Land of fire & fury

Guatemala is all about fire, lava, mountains and magma – which is why I'd decided not to dash around the country but linger in one area, absorbing life around some of the country's most magnificent volcanoes. I'd arrived by taxi from El Salvador, where volcanoes are numerous but small and the weather had been balmy. As I wound up into the Guatemalan highlands, I'd felt the chill. Along the road, people wore bobble hats and ponchos. I was still in flipflops.

The active Fuego-Acatenango massif and Volcán de Agua, near Antigua, looked unnaturally voluminous as I journeyed deeper into the country. I wasn't sure if my sense of scale was still Salvadorean or if it was a trick of the light. The clouds turned black and apocalyptic shortly after Antigua, where the Panamerican Highway fords a high pass. But, suddenly, they lifted, and there below was the lake, shimmering at one end as the low sun splashed down.

From my hotel in Santa Catarina Palopó, on the eastern edge of the lake, I watched what seemed like a slow sunset, wispy salmon-coloured clouds scattering around the cone of San Pedro. This is the most perfectly conical of the three big volcanoes on the west bank. To the south I could see Volcán Tolimán, flanked by Volcán Atitlán; a few clouds shifted around this less photogenic pair.

Walking around town I asked two men, in Spanish, where was the best place to eat. They responded with a string of words that sounded like smashed glass and pointed to the beach. I later found out the local language is Kaqchikel. I ate some tortillas, drank a beer and slept well thanks to the pleasantly cool climate.

The next day I took a boat, skippered by the amiable Juan Ismael Xingo, from Santa Catarina Palopó to Santiago de Atitlán, the largest of the lakeside settlements. Crossing the lake allows you to see the three volcanoes and the water under a new light and from new angles. En route I talked to Juan about the Mayan language I'd heard, and he explained that we were now crossing to a Tz'utujil-speaking area.

It's about 14km – 30 minutes by boat – from Santa Catarina to Santiago; it would take a car 2.5 hours to do the trip overland. ►



# 'Lots of different towns and villages surround the lake. Some are dubbed 'Gringolandia' because of all their expats; others have no roads. A handful have kept faith with traditions'

◀ As we reached the centre of the lake, a wind was getting up and there were small but choppy waves. Juan shared a *Romeo and Juliet*-style legend about a more powerful wind. The Xocomil, he explained, is a divinely ordained gust that blows to bring together two lovers from the two language groups, which have long been rivals.

## Traditions warped in cloth

Lots of different-sized towns and villages surround the lake. Some are dubbed 'Gringolandia' because of all their expats; others have no road connections. A handful have kept faith with traditions. Above the settlements are either volcanoes or steep, forested mountains with ridges that suggest anthropomorphic forms – one is called 'Mayan Face', another 'The Elephant'. Where the land allows, the indigenous communities till fields and build terraces, cultivating mainly coffee, as well as onions, *frijoles* (beans), tomatoes, chickpeas, maize, avocados and tropical fruits.

In Santiago I visited Cameron Krummel, an American raised on the lake who helps run Cojolya, a non-profit company that supports traditional backstrap loom weavers. The organisation was founded by Cameron's mother Candis in 1983 and now has a smart shop as well as a small museum on the main drag. The latter shows the workings of the looms and weaving pegs that, for the Mayans,

have profound connotations linked to birth and the female body; it also displays some fine loom-woven clothing. A quote by Nobel Prize-winning Guatemalan poet Miguel Ángel Asturias captures the beauty of the intricate brocades: 'So many symbols, stars and conjunctions are warped in their cloth'.

These days most Guatemalan males prefer T-shirts with English-language slogans and jeans, but a lot of the young women still wear the *corte* (wrap-around skirt) and multicoloured woven *huipil* (top).

In recent years, Cojolya has branched out into a new project: safe, environmentally sound, economically efficient ONIL stoves from the USA. Through micro-loans and NGO grants, the locals are helped to install these basic concrete ovens – developed by American engineer Donald O'Neal in the mid-1980s – which have an air-vent system that ensures that fires burn less wood, saving the families money.

"They only cost around 1,000 quetzales (£78) to install," said Cameron. "Families recover the money in a matter of months. They use perhaps half the amount of wood – which is also positive in combating deforestation. They don't blow smoke into the kitchens and help avoid children getting burns."

We visited a few families to see how people were getting along with their stoves. Their homes were made from breeze-block, bamboo and zinc, and bereft of comforts. All the women I chatted to – and ►







**Life under the volcano's shadow**  
(Clockwise from here)  
San Pedro is just visible from Cerro de Oro; sisters María and Gloria in Santiago de Atitlán show off their kitchen; cycling is a good way to visit the church of San Pablo; rush hour in San Juan la Laguna







◀ only women matter in Guatemalan kitchens – were delighted with their money-saving stoves. In the house of Josefa Sinabestis, there was an ONIL stove as well as a traditional *comal* – a big flat pan set on stones and burning logs. The room was full of smoke.

“My mum won’t use the new stove,” said Josefa, smiling. “She says it takes too long to heat up the tortillas.” In another house, Juana Cecilia Qehu-Mendoza told me she would make a hundred tortillas that morning. There’s no time for idling while a stove warms up.

## Living local

At San Juan la Laguna, a choppy 20 minutes away in Juan’s boat, I did a short hike up to a hill called Cerro de la Cruz to take in the view and enjoy the evening breezes. Afterwards I visited the local coffee cooperative. There were freshly washed yellow beans left out to dry on every available level surface. Workers kept arriving with fresh sacks of beans to have them weighed and get paid for the day. As elsewhere in Central America, this high-grade, organic, *sol y sombra* (sun-and-shade grown) coffee is exported to North America, Europe and Japan where it’s toasted for the fairtrade packagers, retailers and coffee shops. Workers might earn as little as 50 quetzales (£3.90) for a day’s very hard graft.

I stayed overnight in San Juan, sleeping at the home of Juan Mendoza, Gloria Encarnación Cholutio Mendoza and their six kids, aged from 20 years to 18 months. We dined on chicken and vegetables and chatted about work, food, gender, traditions and

politics. Juan told me the military dictatorship killed lots of indigenous lake-dwellers during the 1980s. He said his parent’s generation were caught between the government and the guerrillas. “They [the guerrillas] came to force us to join them. I had to learn how to shoot a rifle when I was just 15. They used kids as soldiers. During those days, you wouldn’t go out in San Juan after 6pm, after it got dark, because you might just disappear.”

The evening was not sombre though. Juan and his 13-year-old daughter Melissa sang religious songs and a powerful version of Roberto Carlos’s ‘Amigo’. Gloria breastfed the youngest during the impromptu concert and then got out her back-strap loom. Traditional weaving might be dying out elsewhere, but not in this household. I had a strong sense that they were a solid family committed to their culture. Juan said the *cofradía* (traditional brotherhood of elders) remained strong in San Juan.

But the Mendozas were poor. After we had our cups of Nescafé the next morning, Juan went off to harvest beans for the premium coffee roasters of the rich north.

## On Golden Hill

It was after my homestay that I went off to climb Volcán San Pedro. Héctor was the best kind of guide: he let me hike at my own pace – somewhere between sloth and tortoise – for the three-hour ascent. We rested regularly, took in the views, spotted birds and squirrels. I slugged plenty of water.





**A paddle dabble**  
Kayaking in Lake  
Atitlán; (left) murals  
brighten San Juan  
la Laguna

## ‘Local people believe Kukumatx – the feathered serpent – lives in this cave, which connects to a tunnel under the lake; when the serpent moves, there are waves on the water’

The walk took us through coffee plantations; shade was provided by avocado trees, which were generous with free fruit. Then we entered a wilder, transitional forest. We met some young, fit-looking people coming the other way who had given up and turned around. Their guide said it was too steep and the altitude was getting to one of the group.

Towards the top, we were in cloud forest. The trees had broader bottle-green leaves, lianas snaked around mossy trunks, hummingbirds squeaked in the lower trees – and the cloud came in. In fact, from the summit I saw nothing at all.

The descent was a classic knee-jolter, but we took it slowly. I had a rudimentary walking pole to take some pressure off at least one knee at a time. When we came back into the sun and saw San Pedro la Laguna down on the lakeside, I was glad I’d made the effort.

The next day I climbed a smaller hill – the Cerro de Oro, a lava dome at the foot of Volcán Tolimán. This time Héctor led the way, up a steep path used by workers. We passed a 7m-high stone used

by shamans and near the top he showed me a pothole thought to be the dwelling place of a Mayan god.

“Kukumatx is the feathered serpent, our equivalent of the Aztec’s Quetzalcoatl,” Héctor said. “Local people believe Kukumatx lives in this cave, which connects to a tunnel under the lake that runs to Quetzaltenango [Guatemala’s second-largest city, 84km to the north-west]. When the serpent moves, there are waves on the lake.”

The Cerro de Oro – Golden Hill – may get its name from a Spanish attempt to mine the volcano, which, Héctor told me, resulted in a disaster that killed many miners. No doubt this was the serpent showing his wrath. But Héctor was a rationalist and said the name may also allude to the way the hill glows in the dry season, when the sun rises on its yellowing foliage.

### Pedal & paddle

Later, on a cycling trip, I found myself back in San Juan with Juan Carlos, one of Héctor’s trainees. We set off from tiny Tzununá and ►










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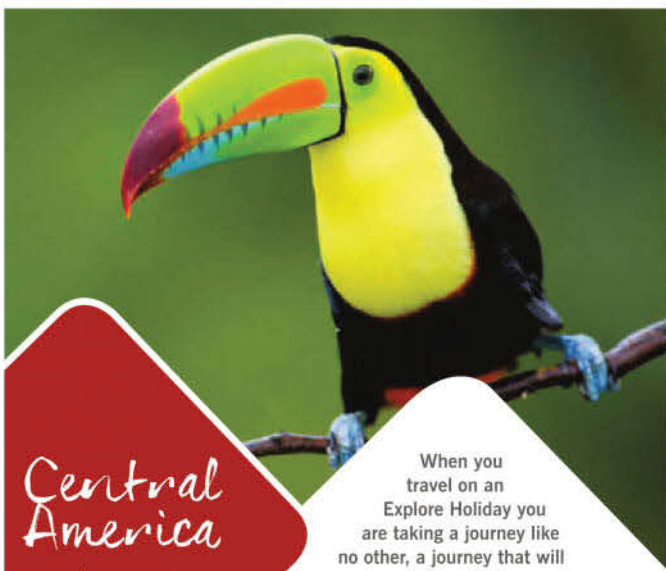
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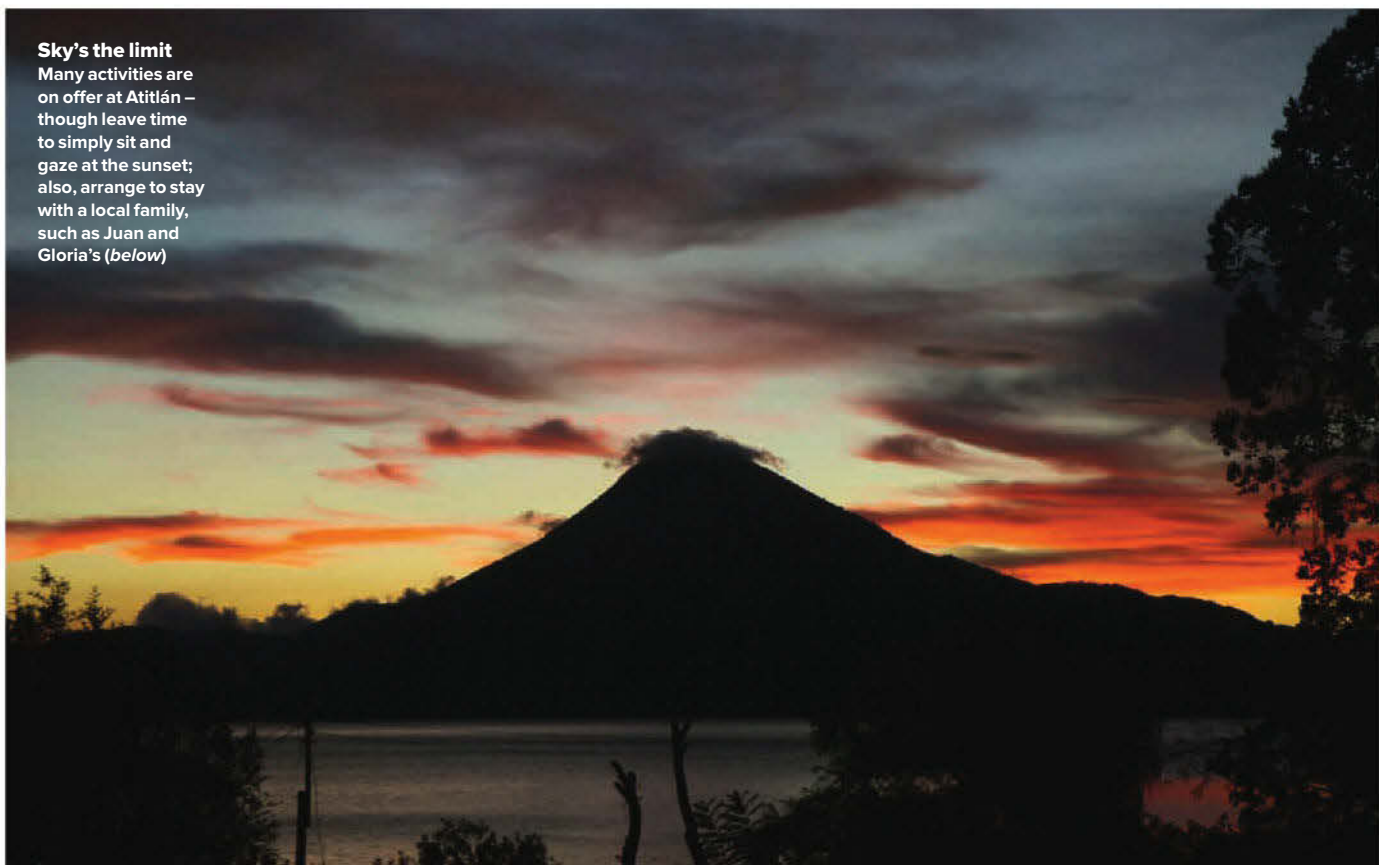
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**Sky's the limit**

Many activities are on offer at Atitlán – though leave time to simply sit and gaze at the sunset; also, arrange to stay with a local family, such as Juan and Gloria's (below)



## 'Spend a week or more on the lake: you can water-ski, paraglide, sail, dive, horseride, run a marathon or circumnavigate the crater on foot, bike or pogo stick'

◀ followed an up-down road via the hamlets of San Marcos and San Pablo – saints seem to own most of the laketowns. Long climbs and a hot sun made it a workout, but the views were glorious.

At a beach called La Cristalina – so named due to the volcanic dust in its water, which glows like gold crystals – we hired a double kayak and paddled out to where fishermen were bringing in black bass and tilapia. Juan Carlos told me a story about a lost city in the lake that was the final home of anyone who disappeared: they didn't drown, they just went to a better place.

After dropping off the kayak, I had my first swim in the lake – it was cool, calm and refreshing after the exercise. But by the afternoon the powerful sunlight had heated the water and filled the air above the crater with turbulent low cloud, which later flashed with silent lightning.

### Lovely to linger

Towards the end of my week on the lake I went for a stroll around Santa Catarina on a sultry evening. Locals were getting used to me: we swapped "Buenos tardes"; the vendors ignored me. The sunset was even lovelier than on the first evening.

The best travel is transformative. I was getting used to the lakeside and the volcanoes; they were still awesome but also strangely benign, especially under a pink sky. I was beginning to feel at home, because I'd lingered awhile in one place

Guatemala has become something of a gringo gauntlet. Travellers hurtle from the highlands to Antigua to Tikal, ticking off stops. But most of them are missing depth.

A slow trip to Atitlán lets you get stuck into a relatively small but topographically and sociologically complex area, using boats to travel rather than buses.

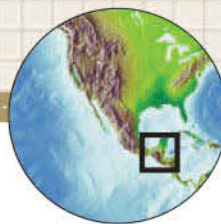
So consider spending a week or more on the lake. You can do all the things I did; you can also water-ski, paraglide, sail, dive, horseride, run a marathon or circumnavigate the crater on foot, bike or pogo stick. But take time out to sit still and gaze at the lake and its guardian volcanoes, and daydream about plumed serpents, wind-tossed lovers and cities of undrowned souls. ■



*Travel writer and Latinophile Chris Moss has contributed to more than 20 guidebooks, including DK Eyewitness: Argentina*



# Guatemala Footnotes



## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Guatemala City  
**Population:** 14.3 million  
**Languages:** Spanish; Maya dialects  
**Time:** GMT-6  
**International dialling code:** +502  
**Visas:** UK nationals are granted a visa on arrival, valid for 90 days.  
**Money:** Quetzal (GTQ), currently around GTQ12.5 to the UK£. US dollars are widely accepted, though you'll need local currency too.

## When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Dry season** – hot in the jungle but comfortably warm in the Highlands. Many local fiestas held November–December, which can be noisy  
 ■ **Rainy season** – though doesn't rain all day. Humidity highest July–September

## Health & safety

No special vaccinations are required. **Drink purified water.** Be aware of the symptoms of **altitude sickness.**

## Further reading & information

**Moon Handbook Guatemala** (Avalon, 2010) provides lots of local insights.  
**Focus Guatemala** (Footprint, 2011)  
**Guatemala** (Lonely Planet, 2013)  
**Beyond the Mexique Way** (first published 1934) by Aldous Huxley  
**Time Among the Maya** (Abacus, 1997) by Ronald Wright  
[www.visitguatemala.com](http://www.visitguatemala.com)  
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## THE TRIP

**Journey Latin America** (020 8747 8315, [journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk)) offers an active six-day trip based around Lake Atitlán. It includes artisan fishing, hiking Cerro de la Cruz and Cerro de Oro, kayaking, mountain biking, ziplining and a local homestay. It costs from £1,050pp (based on two sharing), including comfy B&B accommodation, most meals and excursions mentioned. International flights not included.

If you are on a tight budget, there are lots of backpacker hostels and B&Bs in Panajachel, San Pedro and San Juan.

## Getting there

**Iberia** (0870 609 0500, [iberia.com](http://iberia.com)) flies London Heathrow–Guatemala City via Madrid. Returns start at £514; journey time is around 16–17 hours, including a short stop in Spain.

## Getting around

Around the lakeside each town or village has a *playa pública* (public jetty or pier) from which **motorboats** known as

*tiburoner* depart.

The skipper leaves when he has 12 passengers, to make the journey worth his while.

A typical crossing from Panajachel – a major hub for lake traffic – to San Juan La Laguna costs GTQ35 (£2.80).

To get between villages using overland transport, choose between **pickups** (which carry as many people as they can squeeze on), **tuk-tuks** (which carry three passengers) and local buses – known as **chicken buses**. All these are very economical. Chicken buses compete with smarter, air-conditioned buses for the longer routes to Antigua and other major cities.

## Cost of travel

Guatemala is a cheap country for travellers. Food and drink prices are low – generally, **expect to pay £3–5 for lunch, a little more for dinner, less than 70p for a bottle of beer.** Even a fancy meal in a hotel such as Casa Palopó will rarely cost more than £15. Wages are low, so a small tip (10% is typical) is appreciated.

Travelling by **public transport** is **very cheap**; ultra-budget travellers can use pickups and chicken buses to get around the whole country. Budget hostels and dormitories can

cost as little as £4 a night. For £15 and upwards you can expect some comfort.

## Accommodation

**Villa Santa Catarina** (Panajachel; [villasdeguatemala.com](http://villasdeguatemala.com)), part of a small Guatemalan-owned chain, is a lakeside resort five minutes from Panajachel. It has a big pool, a small whirlpool and carefully tended gardens. Its 38 rooms are simply decorated, with a few crafty touches. Service is patchy, but staff are generally friendly. Doubles from US\$90 (£50) including breakfast and taxes.

**Casa Palopó** (Santa Catarina Palopó; [casapalopo.com](http://casapalopo.com)) is one of the swankiest properties on Lake Atitlán. A nine-room luxury boutique hotel, it is set above the lake, which means it has great views. Rooms are lavishly decorated with colourful indigenous and contemporary art, and feature Italian luxury bed linens and L'Occitane bathroom goodies. No under-12s are allowed. Doubles from US\$185 (£113), including taxes and tip.

**Rupalaj K'istalin** (San Juan La Laguna; [sanjuanlalaguna.org](http://sanjuanlalaguna.org)) is a community organisation that has 20 homestays in the area; it can also help with wider plans for lakeside wanderers.

## Food & drink

Guatemala's cuisine has not been fully bulldozed by US-style fast food. In areas where Maya culture dominates, such as Lake Atitlán, the **diet is based around maize tortillas** (savory pancakes), **frijoles** (beans), rice, plantain, **yuca**, chicken, avocado pears and mild-ish chilli sauces.

Tortillas come with just about everything. Often the fare is basic, but do look for traditional dishes such as **adobo** (aromatic chilli-based sauce) and hearty meat and bean stews. **Fresh fruit** is widely available, so you can stock up on bananas, pineapples and more exotic items for hikes.

In the touristy centres of Panajachel and San Pedro, you can feast on **steaks, good pizzas and pastas**. Good organic coffee is available in cafés in most towns and cities.

## LAKE ATITLÁN HIGHLIGHTS



**1 Cycle round the lake** A gentle pedal is just the right pace to take in Lake Atitlán's landscapes, street life, agricultural rhythms and the roads – plus, a bike ride is actually less bumpy than a tuk-tuk or minibus.

**2 Climb Volcán San Pedro** You'll feel you've arrived when you reach the summit of this beautiful volcano.

**3 Stay at Casa Palopó** A night in a luxury hotel like this allows time to reflect and indulge in the amazing views from high up. Great value for this level of style, too.

**4 Visit a coffee finca or cooperative** You'll see just how hard Guatemalans work to make the beautiful brew. Also, the shade-grown coffee trees look very beautiful.

**5 Bed down at a homestay** Spend a night at in a local's house – it's eye-opening to see inside one of those many shacks you've been passing. The Maya are warm, welcoming people and more than happy to show off their families and homes.

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A photograph of a seal standing on a sandy beach, barking with its mouth wide open. The seal is wet and its fur is dark. In the background, there are blue waves with white foam crashing onto the shore. The sky is not visible.

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# JUST OARSOME

Follow in the wake of David Livingstone with a  
pioneering paddle down the Zambezi to Victoria Falls

WORDS **PAUL BLOOMFIELD**







**C**rocs and hippos are like icebergs. It's tricky to tell how much of them there is floating beneath the river's surface. Topside, you might spot a patch of reptilian spine, or a glimpse of quizzical eyes. But underneath? Hippos can top three tonnes. Like an iceberg, you don't want your boat – or, in my case, kayak – to run into that.

And crocs? Well, a guide once told me that you can estimate the size of a croc by measuring the distance between its eyes. In my opinion, if you're close enough to accurately gauge that gap, you're too close. Much too close. In any case, it's not so much the distance between the eyes that's important, but the look in them: calm or crotchety, angry or alarmed. Or hungry.

Telling the difference, of course, isn't easy. Which is why, on hippo-heavy day three of our kayak-convoy down the Upper Zambezi, I was very glad to be accompanied by Sven, Titus and Dom – three guides with long experience reading the moods of Africa's aquatic inhabitants. It was a day punctuated by foaming rapids and boisterous demonstrations of might from big male hippos, which reared their alarming, pink-tinged bulks above the water before flumping away with a tsunami-inducing splash.

Yet it was a journey that had started so much more peacefully.

### Just like Livingstone

I'd cast off from the Zambian shore at Mambova two days earlier on a Charity Challenge expedition. The first of its kind, it would see four

novices (myself included) tackle a 110km stretch of the Upper Zambezi by inflatable kayak and raft, culminating in a spot of whitewater rafting below Victoria Falls. Though the 'beasties', as Sven dubbed them with jocular understatement, were certainly hazards, the real Challenge – capital C – was in the physical hardship of paddling and wild-camping on the riverbank.

It's an unusual choice of activity for a visit to Zambia, which is justly famed for its walking safaris and spectacular terrestrial wildlife. Yet my five-day, paddle-powered odyssey would truly constitute a safari, or 'long journey' in Swahili, following in the wake of David Livingstone's Zambezi expedition of some 160 years earlier.

We started, aptly enough, in the same type of craft Livingstone had used: a *mokoro* – a traditional dugout canoe. Pairing up nervously on the riverbank a two-hour drive west of Livingstone, my partner in incompetence and I clambered into the rolling vessel. Our chaperone, a local poler called Costa, helped us launch into a narrow, reed-fringed channel.

My first thought, wobbling upright at the bow, was that poling a mokoro isn't as easy as it looks. My second thought, once I'd swapped places with my boat-mate Mark and hunkered down with an oar in the middle seat, was that paddling a mokoro isn't as easy as it looks. Standing, my shoulders ached; sitting, my rump throbbed even more. My wrist quickly started to seize, and both pole and paddle soon chafed a blister in the crook of thumb and forefinger.

The payoff was that I'd rarely punted through a more bewitching habitat. Cobalt skies dripped sunshine, and the metronomic plop of paddle in water was almost soporific. Though wildlife wasn't the main attraction on this journey, nature wasn't bashful; we'd arrived in the latter months of the euphemistically named 'Emerald Season', and ►



**Tricky transfers**  
The author and his party shift their kit between the wooden mokoro and kayaks – and scan the river's edge warily for the crocs that lurk in the shallows; (left) a Nile crocodile patrols the Zambezi River







**Still water, deep burn**

With more hippos and sluggish eddies, the still sections are harder traverses – a sweating, muscle-burning paddle; (above) the Zambezi River from the air; (right) mokoro are heavy, flat-bottomed and unstable, so standing up to pole can be a hairy exercise



◀ birds were resplendent in breeding finery. A male red bishop paused on a reed to peer at the *wazungu* (white people) paddling past, a rubicund balaclava of courtship plumage surrounding its coal-black face. Sand martins hawked for red dragonflies above the water, and Africa's chipperest riverine species, the malachite kingfisher, displayed its harlequin livery as it flitted among the papyrus.

## Beware the crocs

The mokoro, it turned out, was the easy bit. After a couple of hours' yawing from bank to bank – steering a vessel that's essentially a 4m-long log isn't the most straightforward exercise – we transferred into the inflatable kayaks that would be our craft for the next three days. And that's when the serious safety briefings commenced.

"When we get into the kayaks, paddle away from the banks quickly together," Sven asserted. With his shaggy blond hair, equally shaggy dog stories and khaki shirt, Sven ticked most of the adventure-guide clichés – though the addition of thick specs, heavy-duty knee brace and Yorkshire accent lent him an unusual mien for a Wild Man of the River. But he certainly did a good job of tweaking our nerves.

"When we land, the drill is the same: you'll probably get your feet wet, but keep it brief – haul the kayaks out and move well away from the water. You won't see the crocs in the shallow water – but they're there. And they do attack."

To our relief (and slight disappointment), on that first day both crocs and hippos were notable by their absence. Or perhaps we did pass them – I might have been too busy straining, sweating and swearing to notice; I even missed the clawless otter that Dom spotted, turning just in time to admire the radiating ripples it created as it dived under.

Good kayaking technique, I'm told, involves using abdominal muscles to twist the torso, and flexing shoulders to power the stroke, rather than dragging with the forearms. Fine, if you have the abs to handle it. Mine complained uncomfortably from the off, echoed by aching glutes, wrists and that throbbing blister on my thumb.

Of course, I'd have been disillusioned if negotiating the Zambezi was a doddle. Since that name first leapt out from the pages of my children's atlas it has conjured up deliciously exotic images – Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Kipling's *Great Grey-Green Greasy Limpopo* combined. The reality doesn't fall short.

Rising in Angola, the Zambezi snakes 2,574km past Zambia, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe before emerging into the Indian Ocean in Mozambique. To David Livingstone, it represented hope and, in a way, redemption; he believed that pioneering a navigable route into Africa's interior along the Zambezi would open the region to trade, suppress conflict and eradicate slavery. In simple terms, he failed in his mission; he couldn't admit that the tumultuous rapids were fatal to smooth passage for merchant vessels.

## Life on the riverbank

Livingstone, of course, didn't have the benefit of lifejackets, inflatable kayaks, backup teams and some of the best whitewater guides in Africa. Dom, Titus and Sven not only doled out safety instructions and directions but also titbits of river lore.

Here, the river serves diverse functions: border, road, water source and larder for the villagers living alongside its implacable sweep. We watched fishermen poling mokoro laden with glittering riches – fish. "Daninga fish migrate upstream," explained Dom. "Last night these men set conical traps in the rapids to catch them. In the mornings they return to collect the fish, drying them in the sun to eat or sell."

The Zambezi offers fun as well as food: we passed several yelling gangs of kids leaping into the murky shallows, stopping to wave and shout greetings as we hove into view.

We covered 24km on that first day, passing the Kazungula ferry crossing where Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia meet,



and arriving at our campsite by late afternoon. A lumpy, grassy glade between scrubby copses, it was close enough to the water to lend it a 'what if the crocs come ashore in the night' thrill.

That night, after an impressive feast of campfire curry, sleep came quickly: the combination of exhaustion and the glockenspiel calls of the reed frogs proved a powerful sedative. But I woke at regular intervals, jolted by elephant trumpeting and what I could swear were leonine roars carrying across from Zimbabwe's Zambezi National Park on the opposite bank. At least, I hoped it was the opposite bank.

## The right sort of rain

Next morning my fellow paddlers seemed equally bleary-eyed as we packed up canvas and poles before pushing out – swiftly, of course – into the middle of the broad, relentless Zambezi. Today's slice of the journey would cover a similar distance, but with more confidence (if not prowess) in my paddling, I was able to glance around a little more and absorb the surroundings.

If the sky was drab and grey, the wildlife certainly wasn't. Emerald-backed, Zorro-masked little bee-eaters emerged from their nest burrows in steeper sections of the sandy banks. Reed cormorants adopted crucifix poses atop tree stumps in the river, wings spread out to dry. Flocks of egrets stilt-walked through the shallows. On small islands, trees were adorned with dozens of weaver-bird nests dangling like Christmas decorations, while on the Zimbabwean shoreline a bickering troop of chacma baboons raided the waterberry trees.

After a lunch pitstop on a midriver island, the glowering sky delivered its load as threatened. A rat-tat-tat of raindrops stung my bare arms and drummed the otherwise still water, as if a celestial deity had emptied a sack of pearls onto a sheet of glass. Prepared to be miserable, instead I was mesmerised – it was rain as I'd never ▶

**'Be quick when you land your kayak. You won't see the crocodiles in the shallow water – but they are there. And they do attack'**











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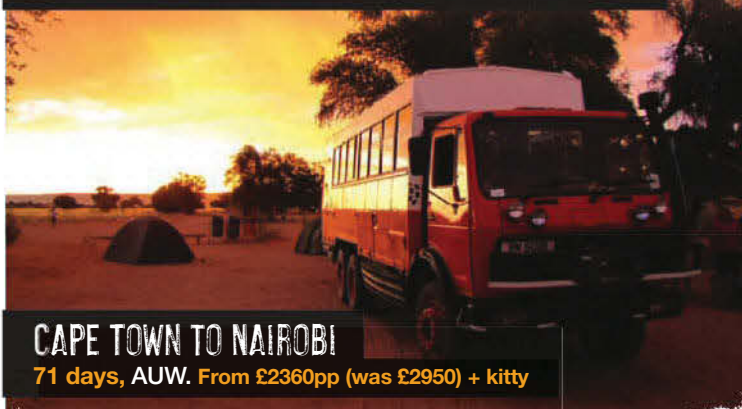


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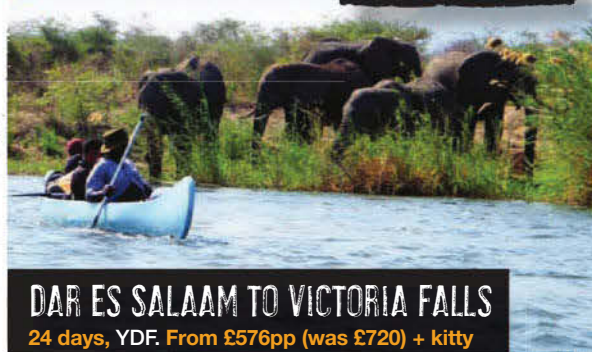
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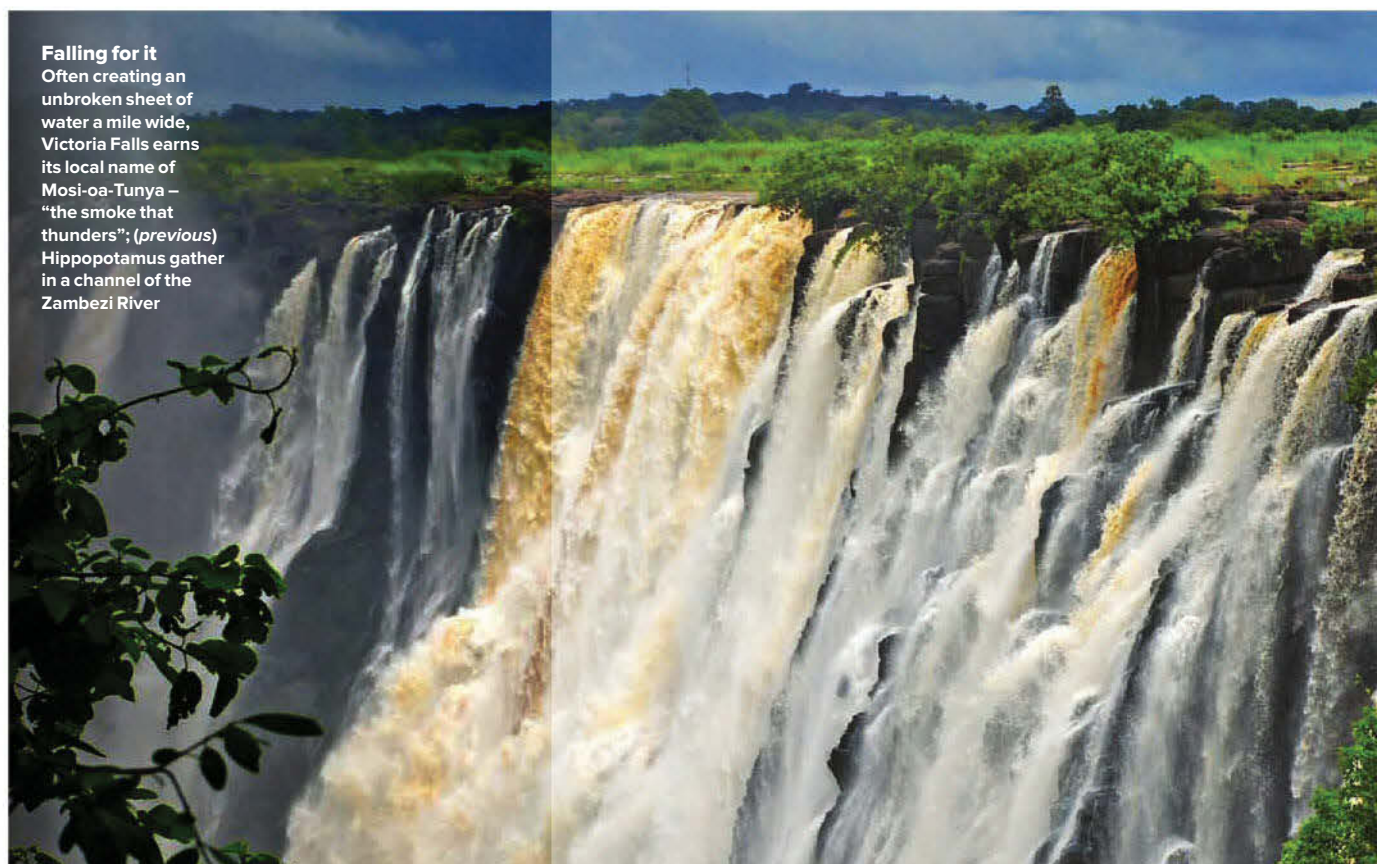
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**Falling for it**  
Often creating an unbroken sheet of water a mile wide, Victoria Falls earns its local name of Mosi-oa-Tunya – “the smoke that thunders”; (previous) Hippopotamus gather in a channel of the Zambezi River

## ‘Rising like an ethereal lighthouse, the Falls’ spray reached 500m into the sky and was visible several kilometres away’

◀ seen it before. And in the warm Zambian air, the downpour was as refreshing as it was transient, clearing up within half an hour.

### Hippo alert

“There’ll be plenty of beasts today, for sure,” Sven announced cheerfully on our third morning. It was to be our last full day of kayaking, taking in the Class II to III rapids at Sinasimba. What with the hippos and whitewater, we were bombarded with volleys of instructions. “Try to avoid knocking your paddle against the kayak,” advised Sven. “Hippos don’t like that noise.”

Mostly, though, the directions were simpler: veer left, take a 45-degree line, or simply, paddle hard. Periodically we’d hit a patch of eddies, the drag nullifying our efforts so it was like paddling through treacle. Muscles burning, the temptation to down sticks and just drift was offset more than once by the appearance of suspiciously rounded rocks midstream. Rocks that sunk out of site or, more alarmingly, raised bulbous heads above the surface to stare us out.

### Fall for the falls

We spent our final morning above the falls in a six-person inflatable raft. I felt both better and worse in this larger vessel. Better, because there was a sense of safety in numbers (and Sven was steering, a clear improvement on my own). Worse, because it was harder to shift direction quickly on the occasions – and there were many – when a pair of twitchy ears signalled a territorial hippo lurking nearby.

But our attention was torn between those irascible mammals and the white, billowing column that appeared on the horizon.

Rising like an ethereal lighthouse, the spray from Victoria Falls reached some 500m into the sky, and was visible from several kilometres distant; it was our guide and companion throughout that final day on the river. So, too, was the rain, which only eased off once we’d hauled out and made our way (by road – cheating, rather) to our final campsite.

Perched high on the edge of Batoka Gorge – the deep cleft carved out by the Zambezi below Victoria Falls – the site at Rapid 10 is as far from glamping as you could imagine. As with our other halts, the loo was a hastily dug hole, topped with a plastic seat. Shower: none. Neighbours: none. Bar: a coolbox. Views: heart-stopping.

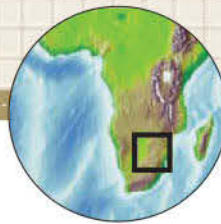
Beneath my feet, just steps from my tent zip, the land fell away into the basalt canyon, which echoed with the Zambezi’s muffled roar. This scene, which seemed so timeless, has actually changed frequently over even the past few thousand years as the river has re-routed its course. In a few more millennia, the rock under the falls will collapse, and another cataract will be created farther upstream. In the more immediate future, a hydroelectric dam, which is due to be built 50km downstream, may see the gorge flooded almost up to the falls, with disastrous effects on both wildlife and whitewater rafting industry – a good reason to get here quick.

But for now, as I sat alone under the glittering feather boa of the Milky Way, such change seemed impossible, and the world full of nothing but the Zambezi’s immense, relentless flow. ■

**Paul Bloomfield** is an award-winning travel writer and photographer with a passion for the great outdoors. Follow him on Twitter: @paulbtravel



# Zambia Footnotes



## VITAL STATISTICS

**Capital:** Lusaka  
**Population:** 14.2 million  
**Languages:** Bantu dialects including Bemba, Nyanja, Lozi, Tonga. English widely spoken.  
**Time:** GMT+2  
**International dialling code:** +260  
**Visas:** Available on arrival at Livingstone airport for US\$50/£35 (single entry).  
**Money:** Zambian kwacha (ZMW), currently around ZMW9 to the UK£. Prices may be quoted in US dollars but once you have cleared immigration, all payments must be made in kwacha; foreign currency is not accepted.

### When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Wet season:** warm, with heavy downpours  
 ■ **Warm and dry:** high season in safari lodges and camps  
 ■ **Hot, dry** but increasingly humid

### Health & safety

**Malaria** prophylaxis is advisable. **Usual jabs** (tetanus, typhoid, hepatitis A, etc) recommended, but check with GP or travel-health clinic before departure. A **yellow fever certificate** may be required if flying via Johannesburg. Drink only boiled or bottled water.

### Further reading & information

**Zambia** (Bradt, 2011), the most in-depth guidebook to the country.  
[zambiatourism.com](http://zambiatourism.com)

### More online

Visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/144](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/144) for links to more content from the trip

#### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ 7 ways to see Victoria Falls – online
- ◆ Walking safari in Zambia – issue 91
- ◆ Elephant-back safari, Zambia – issue 78

#### PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ Zambia guide

## THE TRIP

The author joined the *Zambezi River Challenge*, run by fundraising challenge operator **Charity Challenge** (020 8346 0500, [charitychallenge.com](http://charitychallenge.com)). The next departure for the ten-day trip is 4 September 2014. A deposit of £325 is required, plus minimum sponsorship of £3,850 for your nominated charity; if you decide to take the self-funded option, rather than rely on sponsorship, the trip costs £2,212 (extra fundraising encouraged). The price includes flights to Livingstone from London Heathrow as well as all accommodation, meals and transport, guides and equipment.

### Getting there

The author flew Heathrow-Johannesburg with **British Airways** (0844 493 0787, [britishairways.com](http://britishairways.com)), connecting to Livingstone with **South African Airways** (0844 375 9680, [flysaa.com](http://flysaa.com)). Returns cost from around £980. Journey time is around 14 hours. **Kenya Airways** (020 8283 1818, [kenya-airways.com](http://kenya-airways.com)) serves Livingstone from Heathrow via Nairobi; returns from £819.

### Cost of travel

Zambia is **not** a cheap destination. A stay at a good lodge or safari camp will

often cost upwards of US\$400 (£244) pppn, though **quality is usually exceptionally high**, and that amount usually includes all meals, drinks and activities. Basic campsites are much cheaper – expect to pay less than US\$10 (£6) a night.

**Internal flights**, which are sometimes the only realistic way of accessing national parks and reserves, cost from around £120 per sector. A bottle of the local Mosi lager costs about ZMW7,000-10,000 (80p-£1.20).

### Accommodation

On the river challenge, all **camping equipment** is provided.

The **Zambezi Waterfront** ([safar.com/waterfront.html](http://safar.com/waterfront.html)) is a recommended riverside lodge with chalets, a good-value campsite and a lively open-sided bar and restaurant; doubles cost from US\$140 (£85) B&B, camping US\$10 (£6). The lodge is also a base for **Safari Par Excellence** ([safar.com](http://safar.com)), an adventure tour outfit that organises a range of river kayaking and rafting trips.

### Food & drink

The standard local dish is *nshima* – **stodgy, starchy maize porridge**, livened up with a relish of meat or vegetables. Fine food (and lots of it) is served at most camps, and there are countless cheap chicken-and-chips outlets.

The Zambian-made **Mosi** is a **decent bottled beer**; *chibuku* is the cheap, cloudy brew favoured by most Zambians.

## ZAMBIA HIGHLIGHTS



- 1 Victoria Falls** See the cascade from above or below, from Zambia or Zimbabwe, by day or night – then raft the whitewaters in the gorge below.
- 2 Liwua Plain NP** Explore vast grasslands hosting spectacular birdlife, carnivores (lions, cheetahs, wild dogs) and possibly Africa's second-largest wildebeest migration.
- 3 Kafue NP** Roam the classic landscapes of Busanga Plains, watch for tree-climbing lions and take a night drive to spot leopards.
- 4 Bangweulu Wetlands** Meet the prehistoric-looking shoebill, arguably the world's weirdest bird.
- 5 Kasanka NP** See eight million fruit bats emerge en masse at dusk to feast on fruit (Oct-Dec).
- 6 South Luangwa NP** Hike with jaw-dropping game in the birthplace of the walking safari (above).
- 7 Lower Zambezi NP** Paddle a kayak along channels lined with hippos, or track wild dogs and lions on land.





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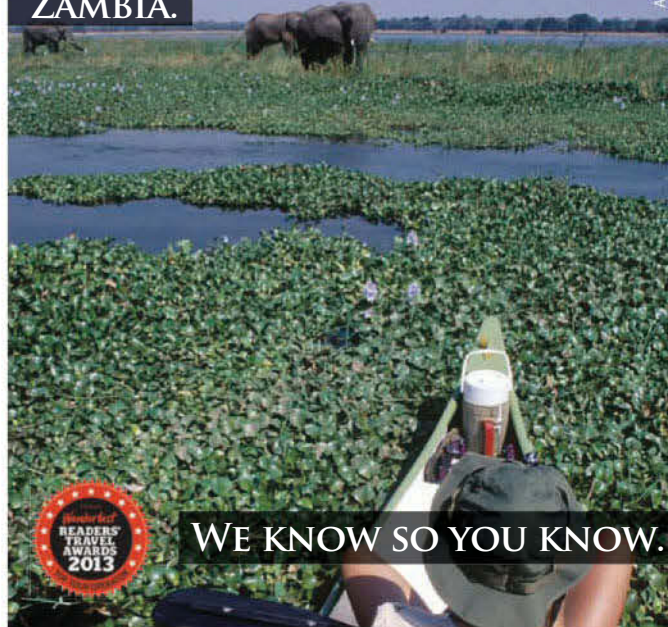
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Have the  
Vikings  
returned  
to Britain?  
see p59

■ **This month's experts include:** Fit-for-a-mountain Alex Howarth, p56 ♦  
High flyer Heather Poole, p59 ♦ Smooth cruise critic Adam Coulter, p60 ♦  
Party-goer Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p62 ♦ Super snapper Steve Davey, p64 ♦



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# Could you trek up a mountain?

**T**he prospect of hiking up a big, scary mountain can seem, well, big and scary. But that's why it's worth doing: few things will give you a greater sense of achievement. Plus, think of the views.

How tough is it though? Can a novice stand on a summit? Or do you need to be a pro? What should you wear? And whichever mountain do you pick?

## Do I need experience?

Let's be clear – we're talking about trekking up peaks, not mountaineering: that is, summits

you can reach without ropes and crampons. And that means almost anyone with a modicum of fitness, a good pair of boots and the right mental attitude can safely have a go.

## How fit do I need to be?

As fit as you can be. Climbing a mountain is a strain on the body, so it's crucial to be prepared. "Even on a gentle trek you may walk five hours a day, and it's hard to appreciate the scenery if your muscles are screaming at you to stop," says physiotherapist Alex Howarth ([fitforsportclinic.com](http://fitforsportclinic.com)).

The ideal training is walking outside and up hills; this will get you used to inclines and

long days on your feet. Visit your GP for a check-up, paying particular attention to the health of your heart and knees. Also, start a pre-trip strengthening regime. Alex recommends starting a programme, such as the one below, at least a month before you go:

◆ **Wall squats:** stand against a wall, slide down until your thighs are parallel with the ground; hold for two minutes.

◆ **Heel raises:** stand with legs straight and raise heels off the ground. Repeat 20 times.

◆ **Hip bridges:** lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on floor. Push your weight through your heels and lift hips. Hold, then lower. Aim for 15-20 reps.



- ♦ **Step ups:** step onto a chair; step down the other side. Rep 20 times, alternating lead leg.
- ♦ **Planks:** hold a press-up position; aim for a minute.

## What kit?

Being prepared is half the battle. *Wanderlust* editor and hiking guru Phoebe Smith says: "Even in hot countries, mountains can attract both the best and worst of the weather – sometimes within seconds of each other."

Think in layers – four of them: base (quick-drying long johns and T-shirts - not cotton), mid (fleece), outer shell (waterproof jacket) and an emergency warming layer (insulated jacket). Remove layers when you get hot and re-add them when cold.

"Vital pieces of kit are walking socks, a pair of worn-in boots and a rucksack that's easy to use, even with gloves on," adds Phoebe. Other essentials include a headtorch, hat, gloves, buff, first aid kit (with blister plasters) and plenty of food and water. If self-guiding, pack and know to use a map and compass, and learn the local emergency signals.

## Which mountain?

There are plenty of peaks to choose from. "The Alps, with hundreds of miles of trails and plenty of summitting opportunities, are the premier destination in Europe," suggests Steve Berry of Mountain Kingdoms and author of *Trekking in the Himalaya*. For example, Switzerland's Barrhorn offers the Alps' highest walkable summit (3,610m). Italy's Monte Vioz (3,645m) can be hiked up without any technical equipment (summer) as can Germany's Kreuzspitze (2,185m).

Travel classics include Morocco's Mt Toubkal (4,167m), the highest mountain in North Africa; 3,726m Mt Rinjani in Indonesia; and Borneo's 4,095m Kinabalu. Tanzania's Kilimanjaro is the ultimate accessible trekking peak – a 5,895m monolith.

For something higher, Pete Royall, of KE Adventure, recommends 6,153m Stok Kangri in Ladakh or 6,476m Mera Peak in Nepal: "Mera is very high but due to the low angle of its northern slopes, it's one of the few so-called 'trekking peaks' in Nepal and is suitable for beginners."

## Will I have to camp?

Accommodation options tend to be limited in remote ranges, but that doesn't necessarily mean nights under canvas. For instance, there are extensive networks of mountain huts (usually with dorm-style beds) across

### TOP TIP

The 'can't be bothered' factor is one of the first signs of hypothermia. If you start thinking, 'my hands are cold, I can't be bothered to find my gloves', stop immediately, put them on and have a sugary sweet and a drink.

the Alps and New Zealand while Kilimanjaro's Marangu Route is hutted (the mountain's other routes are camping only). In Nepal, teahouses (simple guesthouses) are prolific. However, pitching a tent is often the best (and sometimes only) way to reach high summits. Lessen the discomfort by choosing a guided trek on which a team of porters carry the gear and erects your tent for you. Usually these trips also involve a dining tent with furniture, someone cooking your dinner and delivering hot water to you each morning, and maybe even a toilet tent. "The camping element of any trip can be the highlight of your adventure," reckons Steve.

## What about altitude?

Altitude sickness occurs when you climb too high, too quickly. The decrease in atmospheric pressure makes breathing difficult, usually from around 3,000m. *Wanderlust's* travel-health expert, Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, says symptoms start with undue breathlessness, insomnia and headaches; they graduate to persistent coughing, vomiting, disorientation and irrational behaviour – and can be fatal.

"Ideally take several days to reach 3,000m, then plan to ascend at a rate of no more than 300m a day," Dr Jane advises. "It's important to drink plenty – enough to ensure the passage of at least three good-volume pale-coloured urinations in 24 hours."

**'Climbing a mountain is a strain on the body, so it's crucial to be prepared'**

Dr Jane also recommends taking Diamox (acetazolamide) to help speed up acclimatisation; speak to your GP about this.

## What next?

Once you've mastered some 'walk-up' peaks you might fancy a more technical climb – one that requires ropes, crampons and more specialist skills. "Great ways to gain experience is to join a club, take a course or hire a guide," advises Tina Gardner of the British Mountaineering Council ([thebmc.co.uk](http://thebmc.co.uk)).

A good one for fit beginners is Mont Blanc: there are week-long trips that include training in the Chamonix Valley before making a summit attempt. Also, Cotopaxi in Ecuador and Huyana Potasi in Bolivia provide striking intermediate-grade climbing.

### Case study

## TRISH DAVENPORT

*Wanderlust* reader and novice hiker who took on Kilimanjaro, the world's highest walkable peak



### Why did you decide to climb Kilimanjaro?

I was turning 40 and didn't want to do so gracefully so I asked

family and friends for big ideas to do for my birthday. A friend mentioned she was planning to climb Kilimanjaro and asked if I wanted to join her.

### What training did you do?

I joined a hiking group and started doing day hikes and weekend trips.

I also did boxing, and started running a few times a week. On weekends I would cycle or run up the stairs.

### What challenges did you face?

The biggest challenge was the final ascent to the summit. We started just before midnight – it was cold, difficult to breathe, and I felt some minor symptoms of altitude sickness. There were a number of times when I wanted to turn back, but then we would stop for a break – the cold and a sip of cocoa motivated me to keep moving.

### What was your favourite part?

Camp. The porters would have our tents set up and welcomed us to camp at the end of each day's trek with singing, followed by a snack and then a tasty dinner. Our group of 13 really connected; we had a lot of fun.

### What did you hope to get out of it?

A memorable adventure and validation that you're only as old as you feel.

### If you did it again, what would you do differently?

Make sure my friends and I all reached the summit at the same time to be able to get photos together.

### What tips would you give to other first-time climbers?

Book with a good company. Follow their advice, especially packing. Also, you don't need to be in top physical shape, getting fit and regular hikes help. Most importantly: have fun! 🎉

>> Want to know more? Check out our *Ultimate Guide to Climbing Kili* at [www.wanderlust.co.uk/144](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/144)





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Here lies Hagar  
A Viking burial ground  
in Denmark



Instant Expert

# Vikings

## TOP TIP

A week in Denmark is the ultimate Viking getaway, time enough to visit Jelling, Bække, Ribe, Trelleborg, the Silkeborg Museum, the Ladby ship-burial and more.

### Have the Vikings returned to Britain?

Essentially yes, but with much less social uproar and ultra-violence than last time. From 6 March to 22 June, the British Museum will host a new exhibition, *Vikings: Life and Legend* (£16.50; [britishmuseum.org](http://britishmuseum.org)), about the seafaring Scandinavians – its first for over 30 years.

### Do I really want to spend a day with these savages?

Steady on. The modern image of the Viking has become a clichéd caricature of barbarity, but the exhibition aims to dispel the myths and educate people on the reality of this innovative bunch, who successfully colonised a huge chunk of Europe (and elsewhere) from the late-eighth to the 11th century.

### OK, so what's on show?

Excavated weaponry, armour and stolen treasure, as well as Viking skeletons recently found in a mass grave near Weymouth. The star attraction is the remains of the *Roskilde 6*, a 37m-long Viking ship dating from AD 1025.

### And what about horned helmets?

I wouldn't count on it. The idea of Vikings wearing these spiky hats into battle is

romantic fiction – they would have been far too cumbersome and hazardous, not to mention precious.

### Interesting. So where can I see Viking stuff in situ?

Several places. The UNESCO World Heritage site of Jelling in Denmark is perhaps the best, with two grave mounds (one believed to belong to Gorm the Old), two runic stones and a church dating back to AD 1100. Other European options include the reconstructed Viking-era village at Foteviken, Sweden, and the excavations at the German port of Hedeby.

Alternatively, venture to L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada, to explore the remains of the only known Viking settlement in North America.

### Anywhere closer to home?

Pop into York's Jorvik Centre, then head for Lindisfarne Island, just off the coast of Northumberland: it's where, in AD 793, the Vikings first landed in Britain, which for many historians signalled the beginning of the Viking age.

5-step guide to...


## BEING A FLIGHT ATTENDANT

**1 Don't go into it for the wrong reasons.** No one becomes a flight attendant for the money. In 1995 I made \$18,000 a year working for a major US carrier. Nowadays most new employees make less than that.

**2 Make sure you fit the bill.** The height requirements are for safety reasons – tall enough to reach overhead safety equipment, but can't be so tall that their heads hit the ceiling (Typically from 5'3" to 6'1"). Weight must be in proportion to height – if an attendant can't sit in the jump seat without an extended seat belt, we can't fly.

**3 Get the right experience.** Attendants spend lots of time with passengers, so experience dealing with people in a customer service role will help. Being flexible and keeping calm under stress are also key attributes. A second language helps, but isn't a necessity.

**4 You need guts.** Plane crashes are rare but the possibility is always present. Imagine yourself on a pitch-black plane that has momentarily lost power – how would you react?

**5 Ask yourself the big question.** Why do you want to become a flight attendant? Remember: this is a rewarding but hugely challenging job. And whatever you do, don't forget to smile! 

Tips created with assistance from Heather Poole ([heatherpoole.com](http://heatherpoole.com)). Her book, *Cruising Attitude: Tales of Crashpads, Crew Drama, and Crazy Passengers at 35,000 Feet* (Harper Paperbacks, £9.99), is available now.



# ASK THE EXPERTS

Cruising Australia, turning your group tour into a solo photography trip, jab advice and prepping for Kili. Our experts answer your travel queries...

## THE EXPERTS



**ADAM COULTER**  
UK Editor, Cruise Critic  
([www.cruisecritic.co.uk](http://www.cruisecritic.co.uk))



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the independent guide  
to the Caribbean



**HENRY STEDMAN**  
Author of *Kilimanjaro: The  
Trekking Guide* (Trailblazer)

**Q** Is cruising a good way to see Australia?  
**Emily Reynolds, by email**

**A** Cruising in Australia is booming, and there are an increasing number of round-Australia itineraries. It's a great country to see by boat because most of its cities are on the coast: city-hopping here usually means expensive flights or long drives; travelling by ship is more relaxing.

Interesting ports of call include Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. You can't 'cruise' to the Barrier Reef, but smaller ships call nearby and then offer tours out to the site in small boats.

Several cruise lines have ships based out of Australia. A sample seven-day round-trip from Brisbane might call at Airlie Beach, Yorkeys Knob, Port Douglas and Willis Island. For a more adventurous getaway, Lindblad Expeditions cruises to the Kimberley region, one of the most rugged and remote areas on the West Coast, offering opportunities to explore Wyndham, the Bungle Bungles and Montgomery Reef.

For Brits with time, who prefer not to fly, P&O offers a 46-night cruise to Australia from Southampton!

**Adam Coulter, UK Editor, Cruise Critic** ([www.cruisecritic.co.uk](http://www.cruisecritic.co.uk))

**Q** I'm going on a small group adventure trip – how can I make sure I still get time to take photos?  
**Pete Browning, by email**

**A** Many keen photographers will pay extra to join a photography tour, as it can be hard to find time to be creative on a conventional organised trip. However, that's not always possible.

On a group trip, the first step is to get the leader onside: explain that you want to maximise time for taking pictures, and will skip guided visits in order to walk around on your own. A good trip should stay in central locations: this allows you to be up and out

for sunrise, but back in time for the group activities, which will usually start later. Pick a trip that includes free days too, so you can explore on your own.

When you have to be with the group, plan and prioritise what you want to photograph, and skip straight to that if possible. If you do everything the group does, but take twice as long, you'll make yourself unpopular.

Your fellow travellers can be an asset though. Include them in your pictures, interacting with locals, doing adventure sports,

## TIPS!

If you're thinking about taking a cruise but worried about being seasick, book your room in the middle of the ship where the motion is less likely to provoke your stomach.

**Better by boat?**  
Enjoy all the views of Sydney Harbour from the comfort of your ship



or to provide a sense of scale. Involve them in the process by showing them pictures of themselves and your hobby will be seen as a bonus rather than a hindrance.

**Steve Davey, Wanderlust photography expert**

**Q** Do I need any jabs to visit the Caribbean?  
**W Baxter, Norfolk**

**A** Vaccinations are not generally required when visiting the Caribbean but check with your GP prior to travel. Also ensure that your vaccinations for diphtheria, polio and tetanus are up to date.

There are a few exceptions. For instance, if you're arriving from a yellow fever endemic area, you must produce a vaccination certificate for





**‘Australia is a great country to see by boat because most of its cities are on the coast: city-hopping here usually means expensive flights or long drives; travelling by ship is more relaxing’**

entry to almost all Caribbean destinations. There is a risk of yellow fever transmission in Trinidad (not Tobago) and immunisation is advised.

Cholera is a risk in Haiti, Dominican Republic and Cuba and a vaccination is suggested if you're planning to visit rural areas. A hepatitis A vaccination might be considered for most islands depending on your planned activities.

There are occasional outbreaks of dengue fever in the region, especially Barbados, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, so take precautions against mosquito bites. There is generally no malaria; however there's a risk in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Most of the region is rabies free, though you should seek

advice if travelling to Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Puerto Rico and Trinidad & Tobago.

**Deana Bellamy, *Definitive Caribbean* (definitivecaribbean.com), the independent guide to the Caribbean**

**Q** Is it really worth me taking my own needles in my first aid kit anymore?

**Sarah Jones, by email**

**A** I rarely carry much medical hardware. Usually if you need syringes and needles, you'll need someone expert in their use. Also, there will be supplies for sale in the local hospital.

The best piece of medical equipment to carry is some Steristrips. They're easy to carry

(they can slip into a wallet) and they may help you avoid the need for stitches – and even perhaps a trip to a clinic – if you lacerate something.

**Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, *Wanderlust health guru***

**Q** I am planning to climb Kilimanjaro this summer – what should I be doing now to get myself prepared for this journey?

**A** Ask yourself: Who do I want to climb with? When exactly do I want to climb? And which agency do I want to arrange my trek with? There are hundreds of trekking operations out there so choose with care; my guidebook, *Kilimanjaro: The Trekking Guide* (Trailblazer)

provides a review of all the major ones. At the same time you need to start looking into flights (some trekking operators will book these for you too).

A great resource for planning a Kili trek is [www.climbmountkilimanjaro.com](http://www.climbmountkilimanjaro.com).

As for fitness, how much preparation you need to do for Kili depends on how fit you are in the first place. You don't need to go overboard – the main reason why people don't reach the summit is due to a failure to cope with the altitude, for which no amount of exercise will help. But any aerobic exercise you do will make the climb more enjoyable. Walking, cycling and swimming are all beneficial.

**Henry Stedman, author of *Kilimanjaro: The Trekking Guide* (Trailblazer)**

■ **Insiders' Guide to...**

## TURKEY



Adventure tour operator Exodus ([exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk)) offers a multitude of activities worldwide. Exodus's Turkey expert Ornella Giodano offers

advice for those wanting to get active in Turkey this year...

**TO WALK:** There are a wealth of walking opportunities in Turkey. The most popular moderate walks are through the Lycian ruins on the Turquoise Coast, or discovering fairytale chimneys in Cappadocia. Those wanting more of a challenge should head to the remote Taurus Mountains.

**TO CYCLE:** Gentle sea breezes, some challenging ascents and gorgeous views make the Mediterranean coast a firm favourite with mountain bikers. The south coast provides routes to excite road cyclists, with plenty of rest stops at ancient ruins. The inland Lake District attracts those looking to travel on the old Silk Road.

**TO DISCOVER:** Istanbul is a vibrant city with friendly locals and an astonishing array of historical icons. It's a fascinating start point for discovering the rest of the country.

**TO KAYAK:** The most special area to kayak is around Kekova Island. The 'Sunken City' is off-limits to boats and swimmers, so only really visible to kayakers. This area also has many historical monuments jutting out from crystal-clear waters.

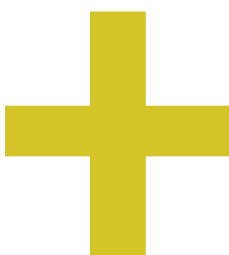
**exodus**  
[www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk)





# TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



## Party fever

Meeting people is the best part of travel – but it can also be bad for your health. **Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** advises on surviving encounters with our fellow man...

**M**an is a social species. Joining to celebrate with others is what we do. But while being so convivial is good for morale, it does provide an opportunity to share and spread diseases and microbes, especially when we gather in great numbers. Forget lions and tigers and bears: humans are the most dangerous and health-threatening species on the planet.

### Shared air

Infections pass between people in different ways. The most challenging transmission route – the one that is most difficult to control – is by way of droplets.

Someone suffering from a common cold fires vast quantities of virus into the atmosphere with each breath and every sneeze for a whole week after the onset of symptoms. Anyone breathing in

that atmosphere – especially those sharing a tent, congested dormitory or aircraft cabin – are in danger of inhaling the virus and falling ill themselves. Witness many of us developing a runny nose a few days after a long flight.

Unfortunately the common cold isn't the only infection that is spread in the air. In the 24 hours before the chickenpox rash appears – before the victim is even aware they're ill – the virus is spread efficiently in air droplets. The more packed together people are, the more likely transmission is to happen, although travellers can protect themselves from airborne infections (such as meningococcus, MMR, pneumococcus, chickenpox and flu) by immunisation.

The most dangerous common airborne infection is meningococcus. This is due to

frighteningly virulent bacteria that can make people very ill very fast. The infection can go two ways. When the bacteria use the bloodstream to travel to different parts of the body they cause meningococcal septicaemia, which destroys living tissue. About 40%

of sufferers die, even in hospital; around 20% of survivors lose fingers, toes and significant areas of skin. The infection can also attack the lining of the brain, causing

meningitis. In this case the course of the illness is slower – but it still kills 9% of victims, and some of the survivors will be left with permanent disabilities, such as deafness.

People gathering in large numbers risk meningococcal disease; this explains why immunisation is mandatory for those travelling to Mecca on the Hajj and the Umrah. Anyone

### TOP TIP

If you find yourself in a stampede try to move across the flow until you get to a wall and press yourself against it until the surge lessens.



planning to join large gatherings, as well as those visiting the 'meningitis belt' of Africa, should be immunised against meningococcus strains A, C, W and Y. The meningococcus C jab (which is part of the routine childhood schedule, and is also offered to university students) does not give enough protection for travelling.

### Mass movement

With any large gathering, there is the scope for accidents. People surging forwards can break through safety barriers; if there is panic, a stampede can injure tens or even hundreds.





**Bath time**  
Kumbh Mela  
bathing at  
Haridwar

## TOP TIP

All kinds of odd things are fermented to produce cheap booze – some drinks can contain glues and other residues that are not that good for you.

where the best hospitals are.

When entering any enclosed space or unfamiliar building, look for the emergency exits; it could save your life if the visibility drops (due to a fire, explosion, etc). Arrange a meeting point in case you get separated from family, friends or your guide. If there's a stampede try to move across the flow until you get to a wall and press yourself against it until the surge lessens. Room edges and corners are probably safer than the centres of rooms in case of an earthquake too.

## Predicting a riot

People venturing out on Chinese New Year, leaving a football match or attending a concert could face similar challenges. It is possible to get swept along and into an area not open to foreigners, thus causing offence or unwittingly breaking local laws. I know of someone being swept inadvertently into a Hindu inner sanctum; another entered a part of a mosque forbidden to their sex. Certainly it can be challenging to navigate back to your hotel.

In an unfamiliar city where you don't speak the lingo, never completely rely on another individual to get you back safe; carry a map. In places where English isn't widely spoken or read, carry a card bearing the name of your hotel in the local language to show to taxi-drivers; hotels can provide them.

It is also easy to become tangled up in demonstrations and political rallies; check for security updates ([www.gov.uk/](http://www.gov.uk/)

knowbeforeyougo). If you can't question locals, it can be hard to judge the mood and likelihood of violence or rioting breaking out.

Visitors may be unaware of what might lead to arrests and even incarceration.

## Party food & drink

Remember that where there are great gatherings there is always scope for consuming stale or contaminated food. It is when you are in big centres of population, that it is most important to eat hygienically prepared or properly cooked food. Choose steaming hot dishes if possible; vegetarian food is safer than meat-containing dishes. Consider pre-travel immunisation with typhoid capsules and Dukoral to maximise protection.

If you are going to imbibe intoxicating substances, try to arrange this in company you trust. Locally distilled hooch is of unpredictable strength and is sometimes fermented from odd substances – including plywood. Any locally distilled spirits can contain harmful toxins and some of the worse hangovers I've experienced have followed drinking *arak*, *toddi* and 'rhum'. Fruit *rakshi* (in Nepal) can be so sweet as to disguise the quantity of alcohol. Drinks containing 'bhang' comprise cannabis and often alcohol too. Be careful what you sample. ■

**Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth** has been Wanderlust's health expert since issue 1.  
[www.wilson-howarth.com](http://www.wilson-howarth.com)

## 'The frail and unfit are at greatest risk of injury but unprepared travellers should also beware'

The greatest mass gathering on the planet is India's Kumbh Mela, which attracts as many as 100 million people. Deaths from trampling seem to happen at each mela; a stampede in 1954 resulted in around 500 deaths; in 2013, 36 pilgrims died in a railway station serving the festival.

The frail and unfit are at greatest risk of injury but unprepared travellers should also beware. It is easy to wander

into a celebration, be swept along with the crowd and separated from friends or guides. If you're in unfamiliar territory, you can get taken into a hazardous situation. Also, crowds or ignorance can prevent escape. Plenty of people are gored or trampled during the Running of the Bulls festival in Pamplona in Spain, for example. Foreigners are less likely to know a quick escape route, or



# TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS




Want to take  
a photo like this?

**Steve Davey**

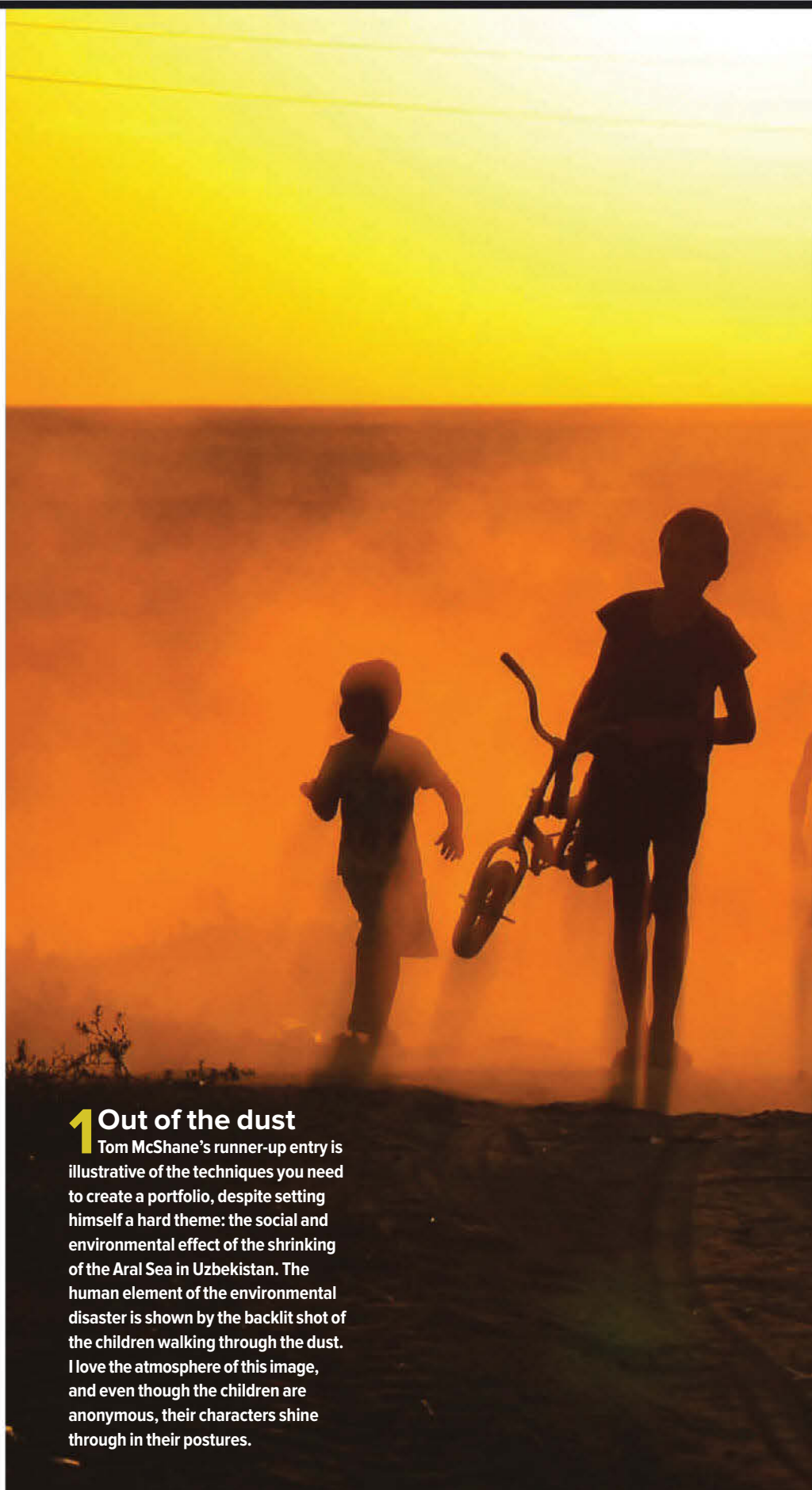
helps you capture the travel moment – this issue, we learn how to put together a portfolio...

**E**ver since the *Wanderlust* Travel Photograph of the Year competition opened a Portfolio category, the judges have been arguing about what you have to do to win: notably submitting five images that work together, but avoid repetition. As you saw on page 10, Renny Whitehead's winning entry seems to ignore this. Only when you look closer do you realise that these pictures are a testament to individual difference in a uniform world.

The first stage in putting together a portfolio is to come up with a theme. When you have this, make a list of vital bullet points about it, and then take an image to illustrate each of these. Use all of your skills and a variety of techniques. Vary your viewpoint, subject distance and even lens choice to make your pictures visually different.

Many portfolios fall down with the editing. Most photographers form an attachment to certain pictures, with one weak picture often letting down the entire portfolio. Learn to be dispassionate: only include one picture per bullet point, and avoid visual duplication. Finally replace any image that is weak – no matter how much you like it personally. 

Steve leads a range of travel photography tours.  
[www.BetterTravelPhotography.com](http://www.BetterTravelPhotography.com)



## 1 Out of the dust

Tom McShane's runner-up entry is illustrative of the techniques you need to create a portfolio, despite setting himself a hard theme: the social and environmental effect of the shrinking of the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan. The human element of the environmental disaster is shown by the backlit shot of the children walking through the dust. I love the atmosphere of this image, and even though the children are anonymous, their characters shine through in their postures.



## 2 Shore leave

The main establishing shot looking over the whole lake illustrates the difficulty of showing something that isn't there. Consequently, it's the weakest shot of the five, though the blank uniformity of the sky does emphasise the emptiness of the landscape.



## 3 Into the sunset

This picture of the salt deposits on the shoreline illustrates a particular feature of the landscape. Shooting at sunset doesn't just produce a visually contrasting image, but carries a sub-text of the end of the lake.



## 4 End of an era

The receding of the sea and the end of the fishing industry is beautifully characterised by this shot of a rusting boat. The Cyrillic graffiti gives a great sense of place although compositionally I would have liked to see little more of the cloud formation and a little less beach.



## 5 Fish stew

This final image is easy to undervalue at first. To me it is reminiscent of images of dried fish in Asian and African markets, although these look unappetising and discarded, while the desiccation of the environment is emphasised by the crack in the ground. As an extreme close-up this image also gives some visual contrast to the whole portfolio.





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■ Traveller's Guide To...

# MULTI-ACTIVITY SHOES

From walking to cycling, scrambling to kayaking and running to sightseeing around town, a pair of these all-rounders can be worn for a variety of outdoor pursuits – here's how to find the best pair for your next adventure

## PURPOSE

Though 'multi-activity' suggests these shoes should be good for everything, specific models may have a bias towards a particular activity. Some may have drain holes, making them better for watersports; others might feature a more rigid sole for cycling; those with better toe protection suit walks on rocky terrain. Think about the activities you do most before buying.

## TONGUE

Look for a cushioned tongue, ideally with bellows (connecting it to the sides of the shoe), which stop water and stones from getting in.

## WEIGHT

Light shoes are not only good for your luggage allowance, but make your legs less tired when you're wearing them. However, for a light weight you may sacrifice some comfort – there may be less cushioning and a thinner sole, meaning that on rough ground you'll feel every bump.

## UPPER

The most common fabric is a synthetic mesh (keeps weight down and is very breathable), often mixed with suede or leather panels.

## TOE

A stiffer toebox will offer better protection from knocks – push down on it to check how firm it is. Also look for a rubber rand (the bit that covers the upper with the sole) – the larger it is the better protection and durability it offers.

## HEEL

This part of the shoe really supports your foot so look for something firm that grips well. Check its rigidity by squeezing the heel before you put it on.

## CUSHIONING

How much cushioning you need is a personal choice, but for longer and very active days you may want to opt for more rather than less. Cushioning is often what gets cut down in order to make them lighter.

## FLEXIBILITY

The midsole is responsible for how bendy the sole is. A stiffer sole is better for cycling, scrambling on rocks and long days walking on tough terrain, as it will stop your feet getting tired. A flexible sole is often preferred for low-level walks and running.

## OUTSOLE

Check the lugs – deeper ones will take longer to wear and will grip better on muddy surfaces.





# Roadtest

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



## ANATOM V1 Trail £60

Made from a breathable fabric, these sturdy shoes are ideal if you're heading somewhere warm and dry to do some walking – they'll help prevent your feet getting too sweaty. The firm heel will hold your foot in place and a fairly solid toebox will help protect you from small stones and rocks. A large rubber rand helps with durability and a bellows tongue stops debris from getting inside. There's a good amount of cushioning underfoot as well as around the ankles. The outsole features an aggressive set of lugs in differing sizes to help stop mud build-up.

There's a good balance of rigidity and flex, meaning these shoes could happily be worn on the plane and for walking around town as well as for tackling more rocky terrain and trails. The stiffness would also help stop your feet getting really tired while cycling. The only downside is the weight – at 825g for the pair (Euro size 39) they are the heaviest on test; on longer walks you may start to feel it. But considering the comfort and the price, that's a small sacrifice to make.

**THE VERDICT:** A heavier weight, but a well-designed shoe with great versatility for travellers, at a very reasonable price.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.anatom.co.uk](http://www.anatom.co.uk)



## BERGHAUS Augury II £70

For an extra £10 there's a dramatic drop in weight. The Augury II hits the scales at just 542g a pair (UK size 5.5) and you can instantly feel the difference when you put them on. With weight loss there has to be a sacrifice somewhere – what this shoe lacks is a bellows tongue, which could mean getting small stones in your shoe or water leaking in if you walk through puddles/boggy ground. There is a firm heel to hold your foot well, but the toebox and rand is fairly soft, offering less protection on rough terrain.

These feel less cushioned than the Anatoms but because of the light weight you feel there is more of a spring in your step. Underfoot the outsole boasts a good set of lugs, which are great on muddy terrain. The sole is fairly flexible, which some people may prefer, though on long walks and long cycles your feet may get tired. However, if you plan to do shorter periods of activities, want a comfy shoe for city strolling and need to save on weight, these are the ones for you.

**THE VERDICT:** Despite lacking a bellows tongue this is a well-designed shoe that will be perfect for shorter, fast and light adventures.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.berghaus.com](http://www.berghaus.com)



## REGATTA Carbon Low X-LT £80

Throw another £10 in the mix and the Regatta Carbon Lows offer a waterproof membrane that is breathable too. If you plan on frequent walking across wet ground these will be good – but do bear in mind that with shoes (as opposed to boots) water can always get in the top fairly easily.

Weight-wise these are the second heaviest on test (749g a pair, UK size 6). The toebox is fairly soft but the rubber rand does help give it some structure. There is a good heel to hold your foot in place. The tongue has bellows, though unfortunately I found the fold rubbed a bit, which was uncomfortable – try them on to make sure your foot shape doesn't give you the same problem. The lugs on the outsole are well spaced but not as deep as some on test. Despite appearances the sole is actually very flexible, which may be fine on short walks but less comfy on longer ones and cycling trips. It's got a good amount of cushioning though, which helps on rougher tracks.

**THE VERDICT:** On wet ground these shoes will come into their own, but a very bendy sole could mean that comfort is an issue when doing activities for a long time.

### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.regatta.com](http://www.regatta.com)





## How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit multi-activity shoes that they felt were most suitable for travellers: shoes that are lightweight, comfortable, versatile and under £100. From the ten pairs we were sent our editor, Phoebe Smith (left), took them out on the road to see which performed best. The six here are all 'Wanderlust Approved', with a Value Buy and Best in Test (the overall best buy) indicated. All are available in men- and women-specific fits, with the different names indicated if applicable.



### MERRELL Grassbow £80

Merrell produces two versions of this shoe: one with a Gore-Tex waterproof outer (which will set you back an extra £20) and this one, without; aside from the waterproofing, they are made to the same spec. Much like the Berghaus model this shoe is all about the light weight – at 577g for a pair (UK 5.5), it is the second-lightest on test. The heel is not as firm as others featured here but does hold your foot in place. The toebox is fairly soft, though a small rand does help with this a little. There's a bellows tongue too.

The weight has been saved on the outside, where the panels are not stitched but rather sealed to the shoe; this means that inside there is a good amount of cushioning. Underneath there's a collection of well-spaced lugs for added grip and to help stop debris build up. These shoes are designed for light hiking so the sole is very flexible; however, the high amount of cushioning inside helps with comfort on uneven and rockier terrain.

**THE VERDICT:** For those wanting to use multi-activity shoes for light hiking and trail running these are a reasonably priced light-weight option.

#### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.merrell.com](http://www.merrell.com)



### SALOMON Ellipse / Eskape GTX £100

For another £20 you get a waterproof and breathable Gore-Tex outer that, unlike the Regatta model, does not compromise the weight too much: these weigh in at 652g a pair (size UK5.5) – the joint third-lightest on test. There's a fairly firm heel and a bellows tongue. One great feature is the laces – they run down close to the toe, so when you tie them up you get a close, snug fit; this is especially good for those with narrow feet.

The toebox is a little softer than some, though a large rubber rand makes it stiffer. Comfort-wise there is adequate cushioning – but some of the other shoes offer more. The outer sole features a smattering of evenly spaced lugs for good grip. The sole is quite flexible, so these will be better for lightweight hiking and shorter active excursions rather than cycling or longer distance walks. They are one of the highest priced options here: their value for money depends on whether you think the waterproofing is worth the extra.

**THE VERDICT:** If you want a waterproof shoe that is still lightweight, and you plan to do mainly short walks, this is a good option, though the price might deter some.

#### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.salomon.com](http://www.salomon.com)



### SCARPA Crux £100

Renowned for producing great hiking boots and climbing shoes, Scarpa has taken the technology from both to create a hybrid that's good for walking and scrambling on rough terrain. This bias towards rock is clear: the heel is firm and the laces, as on climbing shoes, begin at the toe for a secure and comfy fit. The toebox is superb, offering the best protection on test. Also, a generous rubber rand helps guard against knocks and adds durability. All this comes in at the same weight as the Salomons (652g a pair, UK size 5.5).

The tongue isn't bellows, so water and debris could get in. Inside there's cushioning, though not as much as some of the others on test. The sole offers a great range of lugs as well as a firm ledge at the toe – good on rock and if trying via ferrata. Of all the shoes on test this has the most rigid sole; there's some flex, but this shoe is designed to help your foot balance on uneven surfaces. This makes them a great choice for cycling and short walks, as well as smart enough to wear around town.

**THE VERDICT:** Though lacking a bellows tongue, these are versatile, well-designed and great for tackling more rocky terrain or cycle rides – if you can spare the cash.

#### IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★  
Design: ★★★★★  
Comfort: ★★★★★  
Versatility: ★★★★★  
Value: ★★★★★  
Overall: ★★★★★  
[www.scarpa.co.uk](http://www.scarpa.co.uk)





# A WHEELY BIG ADVENTURE

One lake, two wheels, three countries – with its easily marked trails, flat terrain and ample escape routes by bus, train and ferry, a circumnavigation of Lake Constance is perfect for even reluctant cyclists

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**







**L**ove in a foreign country. It can happen in so many ways. There's the obvious wham-bam type: adoration comes fast, followed by a proclamation to the world! Then

there's the slow, creeping onset of affection that neither one of you sees coming. It was the former that I was witnessing on a bridge in the Austrian town of Bregenz. I watched as a couple took out a red padlock, which was engraved in gold with their names and two interlinked hearts, and clamped it securely around the railings.

"It's to show our unbreakable love," the woman explained when they caught me staring. With that they kissed and threw the key into the fast-flowing river below.

At the same time, in this exact spot, another relationship was beginning to blossom, between me and my hired bicycle – though, being the second kind of love, I didn't know it yet. Earlier that morning I'd picked the bike up from town, ready to

start a week-long adventure circling Central Europe's third-largest lake. So far we were getting off to a quarrelsome start, mainly because, as I watched the loved-up couple, I was emptying my pockets and panniers, desperately trying to find my own key – to the bike lock.

Like a clasped padlock, I'd always been closed to the idea of a cycling trip. But once I'd learned that a journey around Lake Constance meant crossing country borders almost daily, offered endless café stops, came with a multitude of escape routes (courtesy of efficient public transport), and that someone else would transfer my luggage, I began to feel more open. Before long, I found myself setting off on the first 41km of my 214km journey...

### DAY 1

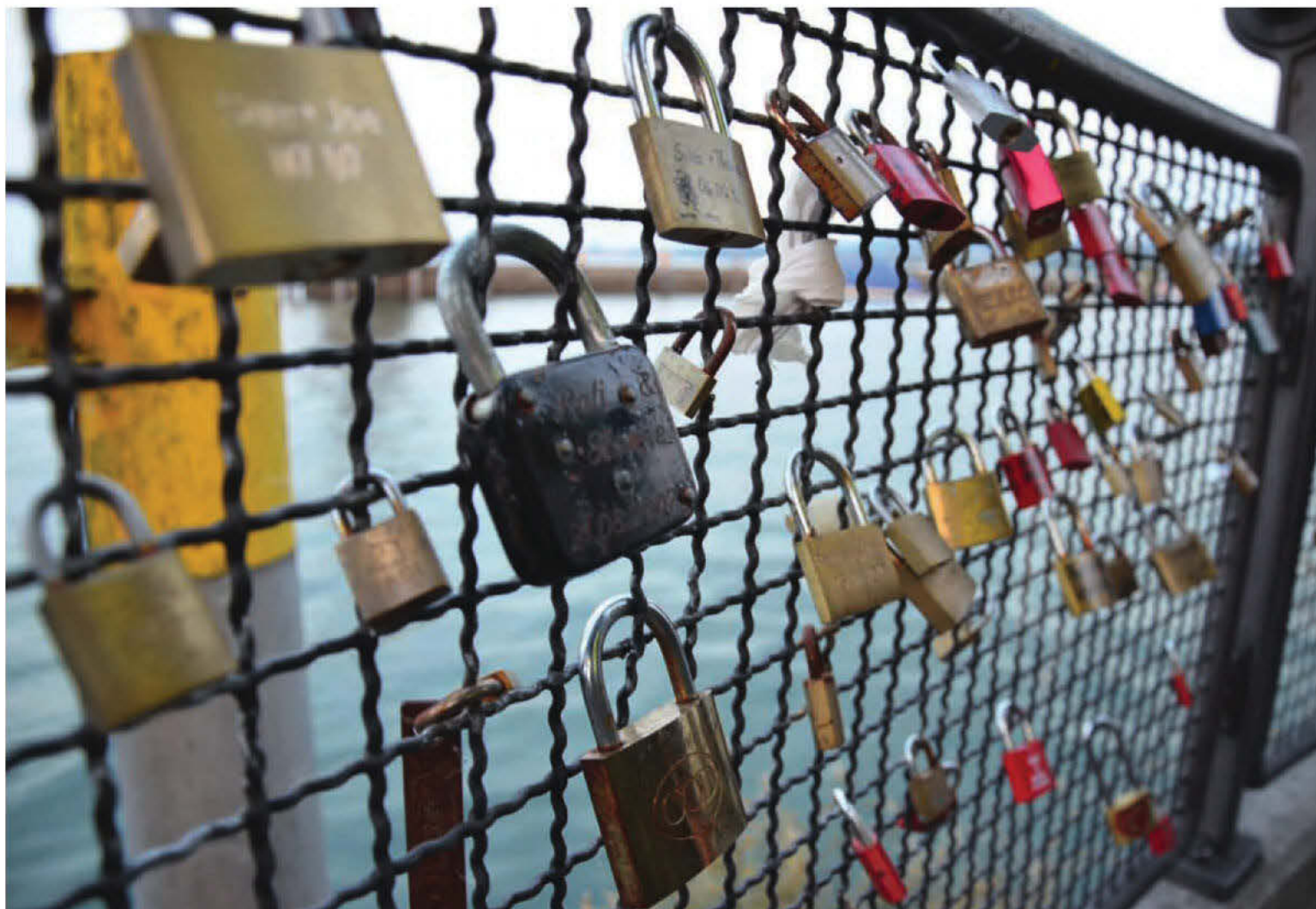
#### Distance to cycle: 41km Ice cream count: 0

Lake Constance. An over-inflated bulge in the River Rhine, here, Switzerland, Germany and Austria meet in a glorious mix of verdant vineyards, baroque churches,

medieval castles and bench-lined promenades. It's 273km in circumference, and with the official Bodensee Radweg trail covering 214km of that, there's really only one way to tackle it: on two wheels.

"You never know what will happen," said the lady at the hire firm as I jumped on my bike. Immediately the saddle slipped, my over-stuffed panniers caused me to wobble and I proceeded to knock the bike over as I leapt off and tried to put it on its stand. Making my way out of Bregenz, I decided I disliked my seven-gear companion.

The small Austrian town was off to a sleepy start. Most of the coffee shops were still closed as sunlight started to hit the wooden-beamed buildings of the old Upper Town, which sat dreamily among the foothills of the Alps. These cobbled streets date from the 13th century, though further back the area was a Roman camp, patrolled by centurions; today only dog-walkers and roller-skaters were doing the rounds, enjoying the sunshine. As I pedalled, I passed the floating stage that gets rebuilt anew every two years for the summer festival. The green and orange dragons flanking its edges seemed to watch me with their giant eyes. ►







### Blazing saddles

The floating stage in Bregenz, Austria; (left) love locks adorn bridges and fences along Lake Constance; (above) religious relics on the track near Rohrspitz peninsula, Austria, a couple of kms from the Swiss border; (previous page) Wild flowers on the official Bodensee Radweg trail in Eriskirch Nature Reserve, Germany.





◀ Following the trail was a dream. Navigationally there's just one rule – keep the lake to your right. And despite my rocky start I began to settle into the saddle. I made my way under trees and over bridges covered with love locks; I stopped to take a walk, locked up my bike and – for what wasn't to be the first time that day – briefly lost the key.

At some point I made my transition into Switzerland. There was no fanfare; no passport office, no duty free. Only the greetings subtly changed, from “Grüss Gott” to “Grüezi”.

Despite my initial reluctance to pedal I was pleasantly surprised at how good I felt. Kilometres seemed to melt by with each turn of the spokes, my mind being distracted by cuckoo-clock houses, outdoor art and glimpses of the sparkling lake. By the time I arrived at my hotel in Arbon I felt like I could have cycled through the night.

However, the promise of beer and *spätzle* (noodles) made me reassess my enthusiasm.

## DAY 2 Distance to cycle: 67km Ice cream count: 2

The next day was to be less gentle. Between me and a comfortable bed was over 60km of trail and my legs were a little heavy from the previous day.

The air was hot and the sun glaring as I finally repacked my panniers (after having to look for my bike lock key – again). I set off, racing alongside a train that I could have taken to cut out 20km. Giant Swiss flags lined the streets and ferries emerged onto the lake at the harbour town of Romanshorn. The churches came thick and fast – tall white ones with elegant spires and friendly clock faces, then ivy-coated giants that looked like they'd been topped by giant witches' hats.

The German border was coming up, but I wouldn't be crossing it yet. Leaving the hectic traffic at Kreuzlingen, the route headed inland. Suddenly I was surrounded by farmland, allotments and barns. I slurped down an ice cream in the small village of Gottlieben, with its odd collection of dome-shaped turrets, oriental dragons and dark wooden shutters, before weaving my wheels through fields of wheat. An ugly grey and graffitied concrete bunker came into view, then I emerged back by the lake at Ermatingen. Children were jumping into the water, which certainly looked like a good idea – but then so did another ice cream (or two).

I trundled on and soon I could see the slopes on the opposite shore, dotted with churches and wooden huts. A downhill swoop brought me back to the water and to the town of Stein am Rhein; my hotel was within reach.

**‘At some point I made my transition into Switzerland. There was no fanfare; no passport office, no duty free. Only the greetings subtly changed, from *Grüss Gott* to *Grüezi*’**





Stein am Rhein is one of those towns you can spend hours ambling around with no particular purpose. Encased within the remains of medieval walls, each building has some interesting oddity. There are gilded frescos depicting real events and myths (created to boast of the residents' affluence), an imposing former monastery (now a church), tantalising wooden doors leading into hidden alleyways and small bronze statues of cats.

That night I sipped a beer and watched the sun set while crazy children leapt off the bridge into the water below. Though I kept my feet on the ground I could feel myself beginning to fall for this part of the world.

## DAY 3 Distance to cycle: 56km Ice cream count: 5

The next morning I realised, with surprise, that I felt excited to be reunited with my wheels. I packed lightly and efficiently, having by now learned exactly what I needed; within minutes I was out of the town.

This was to be my first proper taster of the German side of Lake Constance, which makes up more than half the shoreline. I passed a sign bearing a black eagle –

the German emblem – which later seemed quite fitting: as I made my way further into the country, the sky overhead filled with birds of prey. Falcons and kestrels swooped and soared, unperturbed by the cyclists that kept stopping beneath them.

Distracted by the feathery flight show I suddenly felt a pain in my thighs and realised that I was climbing up a rather steep hill. I kept pedalling, determined not to give up, then I turned a corner and the hill kept ascending. With a flick of the gears and some teamwork between me and my bike, we made it to the top. If at any point we progressed from acquaintances to friends, it was here. On the other side, we hurtled down, moving as one.

Towns shot by with unexpected frequency – proving that on this bike trail, you're never far from help. Or a latte. I decided then that I had plenty of time for a detour to the island of Reichenau.

I pedalled along the tree-lined causeway that connects Reichenau to the mainland. The causeway was completed in 1838, but the island's many churches and abbeys were founded much earlier – AD724 to be exact. And, as Reichenau is now as famous for its vegetable growing and ►

### ■ In the Bag

## WHAT TO PACK FOR A CYCLE ADVENTURE

- ◆ **Cycling shorts** Look for padded ones: your bottom will thank you!
- ◆ **Base layer** Choose tops made from fabric that wicks sweat away from your body, not cotton
- ◆ **Shoes** Look for breathable, waterproof multi-activity shoes that have a rigid non-slip sole (bendy soles will make your feet tired)
- ◆ **Helmet** Not mandatory but if you choose to wear one take your own – hired ones may have been dropped and be weaker
- ◆ **Sunglasses** These will keep both the sun and flies out of your eyes
- ◆ **Windshirt** Pick a lightweight top made from a windblocking fabric, good for colder days
- ◆ **Suncream** Use at least SPF30; reapply regularly
- ◆ **Insect repellent** Vital, as midges and mosquitoes are waiting...

**Change of gear**  
(from left) The bridge into Stein am Rhein; cuckoo clock houses near Rorschach, Switzerland; chess and conversation in Bregenz, Austria







**‘Soon, wingbeats from birds were replaced with the clackety-clack of trains leading into Konstanz... I wandered through a jazz festival where people aged 8-80plus met and danced’**

◀ wine production as its religious history, it proved a great lunch stop.

Leaving the island, I passed a wetland reserve where a cluster of birds fluttered overhead. Soon, however, wingbeats were replaced with the clackety-clack of trains leading into Konstanz. Just a kilometre from the Swiss border, the German university town has a vibrant buzz, especially along its waterfront. Here, as the light faded, I wandered through a jazz festival where people aged from eight to 80-plus met, drank and danced.

### DAY 4

**Distance to cycle: 25km  
Ice cream count: 7**

After a short 6km ride, my bike and I boarded the ferry at Staad. Though the

lake stretches on up to Bodman, that area has been a victim of industry – access and pleasant cycling are an issue, so like most who do the trail, I was cutting it out.

If anything defines the northern section of the trail it is the silhouette of the castle in Meersburg that greets the ferry. Built on a steep slope, the whole town is a network of twisting alleys and crooked stairs leading up to a fort at the top; on a clear day it offers views over the southern side of the lake and the serrated Alps beyond.

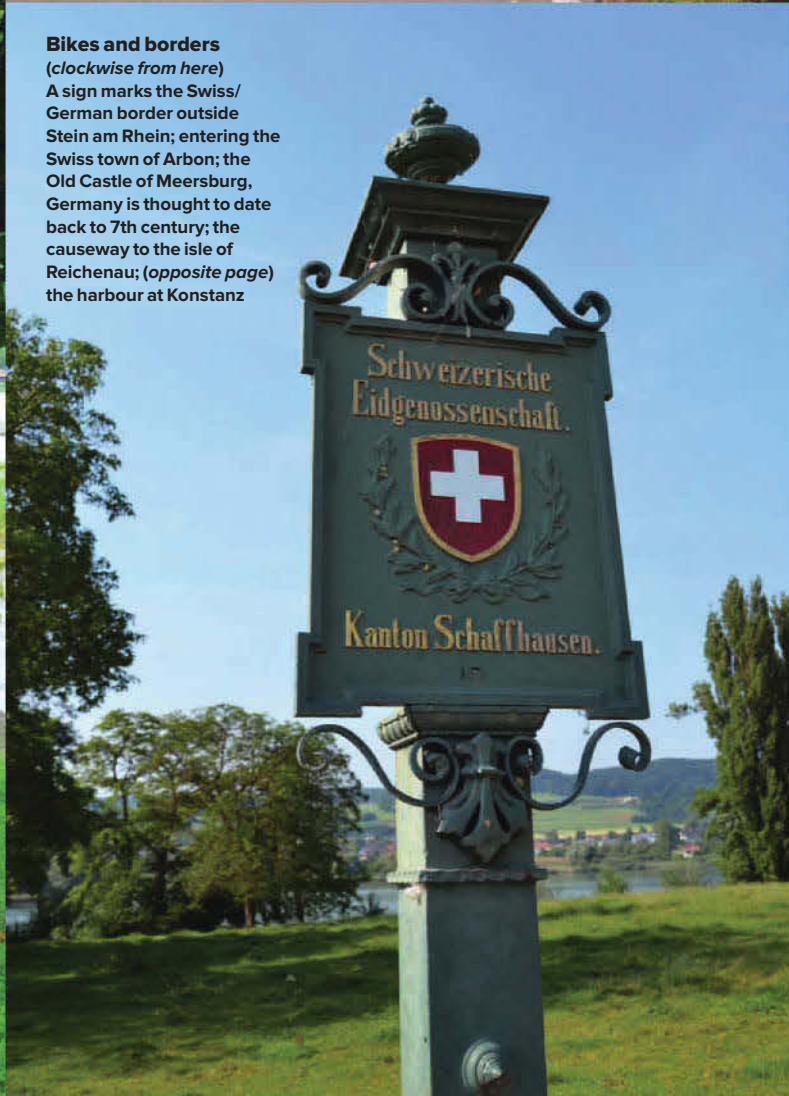
After a couple of hours wandering on foot, I left, passing waterfront parks and fire hydrants painted to look like pirates, en route to the north shore’s capital, Friedrichshafen.

It was here that aircraft manufacturer Ferdinand von Zeppelin was based, and

from where the first commercial transatlantic Zeppelin flight took off in 1928. It marked the start of a golden era of German passenger aviation, which came to a tragic end in 1937 with the Hindenburg disaster. Since then the city has relied on tourists, who come to stroll on Friedrichshafen’s promenade and recapture past glories on Zeppelin pleasure flights.

When I arrived one of the enormous balloons was hovering overhead while a summer festival was taking place on the lakeshore. I joined the families that were sipping beer from steins, eating bratwurst and pretzels, and enjoying the evening sunshine while brass bands played. All the while I found myself stealing glances over at my bike, eager to crack on with our adventure. ►





**Bikes and borders**  
*(clockwise from here)*  
 A sign marks the Swiss/  
 German border outside  
 Stein am Rhein; entering the  
 Swiss town of Arbon; the  
 Old Castle of Meersburg,  
 Germany is thought to date  
 back to 7th century; the  
 causeway to the isle of  
 Reichenau; *(opposite page)*  
 the harbour at Konstanz



### Isle of adventure

Checking out the island town of Lindau, the last stop in Germany before crossing back into Austria



**‘Sitting on an island, Lindau is guarded by a Bavarian lion statue and lighthouse, it’s a beautiful collection of small boutiques, cobbled squares and ornate buildings’**

### ◀ DAY 5

**Distance to cycle: 34km  
Ice cream count:  
too many to admit**

I left Friedrichshafen early. At a farm, two llamas looked up at me curiously; a nun waved hello. In the next hamlet, marked by a totem pole of shields, I stopped to watch the lake’s waves lap right up to the street. It was a Sunday and it seemed the whole village was either heading to Mass or cycling. Switching it up a gear to pass a crowd of pedallers, I realised my own cycling must have stepped up a level.

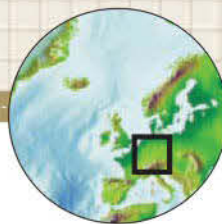
The scent of apples and cherries punctuated the air as I passed row upon row of orchards before arriving in Lindau, one of the best-preserved medieval towns on the lake. Sitting on an island and guarded by a much-photographed Bavarian lion statue and lighthouse, it’s a beautiful collection of small boutique shops, cobbled squares and ornate buildings.

It was a bittersweet moment when I left the island and found myself crossing the border into Austria. By now the bike and I moved in unison, the pedals felt like an extension of my legs, the handlebars like

my own arms – yet soon we would be parted forever. I watched as Pfänder Mountain came closer and felt my pace begin to slow; Bregenz was in my sights.

“You don’t need to lock it up,” said the woman in the bike rental office. But I pretended not to hear her, tightly clamped the padlock shut and tossed her the key. It may have been a short-lived romance, but it was a special one. My two wheels had enabled me to cross country borders, cover ground at my own pace and still stop to admire any curiosities that caught my eye. This had been an affair to remember. **✎**





# Lake Constance Footnotes

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Regional hub:** Konstanz  
**Regional population:** 3.8 million  
**Languages:** German; also (in Switzerland) French, Italian and Romansh. English not always understood in villages.

**Time:** GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)  
**International dialling code:** +41 (Switzerland), +43 (Austria), +49 (Germany)

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** Euro (€), currently around €1.2 to the UK£, and Swiss franc (CHF), currently around CHF1.5 to the UK£. ATMs available in larger towns.

### When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Spring/Autumn:** Best times for biking; less crowded. Spring sees wildflowers bloom
- **Summer:** warm; good for lake dips. Cycle trail and towns can get crowded
- **Winter:** cycling possible but many places close; can be foggy and grey

**Health & safety**  
 Health care is excellent. EU citizens should take a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). No vaccinations required. Tap water is safe to drink.  
**Take insect repellent** – midges and mosquitoes can be a pain.

**Further reading & information**  
 Most guides to Germany, Switzerland and Austria have chapters on Lake Constance (often called the Bodensee).  
**www.bodensee-radweg.com** – Lake Constance Cycle Path Service  
**www.austria.info**  
**www.germany.travel**  
**www.myswitzerland.com**



**More online**  
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## THE TRIP

The author travelled with **Headwater** (0845 564 9349, headwater.com) on its self-guided *Lake Constance Cycling* trip. Prices start at £1,219pp for a ten-night (includes non-cycling/sightseeing days) hotel-to-hotel itinerary including all accommodation, breakfast, eight dinners, bike rental, route notes and maps, and luggage transfer service. Price excludes international travel; Headwater can organise self-drive or air-rail travel.

### Getting there

The most convenient entry point is Zürich. Direct flights to the Swiss hub are available from most UK airports with several airlines. The author flew with **Swiss** (0845 601 0956, swiss.com); returns cost from £150 and flight time is around 1.5 hours. Frequent and efficient trains run from Zürich Airport to Bregenz, in Austria, requiring two changes. Journey time is 1hr 48mins; singles cost CHF40 (£28) from [www.sbb.ch/en](http://www.sbb.ch/en).

### Getting around

The most enjoyable and efficient way to travel around Lake Constance is by **bike**. You can rent one from a local outfit in Bregenz, Konstanz, Salem, Friedrichshafen or Dornbirn. If you tire or it rains, jump on a train, bus or ferry. Most will accept bikes, prices are low and journeys quick – timetables are available in tourist offices and hotels.

### Accommodation

Choices range from hostels to camping, guesthouses to five-star hotels. The author stayed at **Hotel Weisses Kreuz** in Bregenz ([hotelweisseskreuz.at](http://hotelweisseskreuz.at)), **Hotel Seegarten** in Arbon ([hotelseegarten.ch](http://hotelseegarten.ch)), **Hotel Rheinfels** in Stein am Rhein ([rheinfels.ch](http://rheinfels.ch)), **Hotel Halm** in Konstanz ([hotel-halm.de](http://hotel-halm.de)) and **Hotel Buchhorn** in Friedrichshafen ([buchhorn.de](http://buchhorn.de)).

### Cost of travel

Lake Constance will suit all budgets. To keep food costs down, stick to set menus and **buy from bakeries** en route. Expect to pay around €15 (£12.50) for one course in a restaurant and around €4 (£3.30) for a large beer.

### Food & drink

It's a good job you're cycling: portions are generous and carb-heavy – think **potatoes, pasta, noodles and dumplings**, often with cheese. Being lakeside means fish – **kretzer** (perch), **zander** (pike-perch) and trout – appears on many menus. Other local delicacies include **wurstsalat** (sausage salad), **käsespätzle** (cheese noodles) and **schnitzel** (meat fried in breadcrumbs). Try the local **Seeweine** (lake wine) – mostly crisp, floral whites.

## LAKE CONSTANCE HIGHLIGHTS

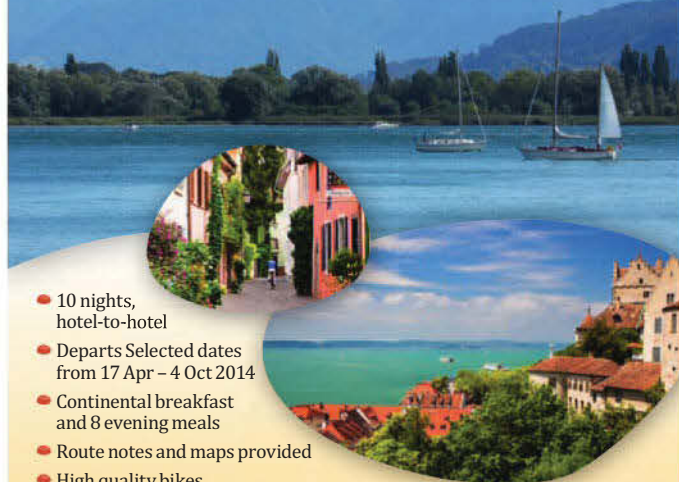


- 1 Pfänder, Bregenz** When you've finished your lake circuit, take the cablecar up 1,064m Mt Pfänder ([www.pfaenderbahn.at](http://www.pfaenderbahn.at)) for a perfect panorama of your cycling achievement and great views over to the Alps.
- 2 Stein am Rhein** Meander around the old cobbled streets, gaze at beautiful frescos and grab a celebratory coffee or beer in the main square.
- 3 Reichenau** This island, connected to the mainland by a causeway, has a rich ecclesiastical history, vineyards and a great deli (on the left, at the end of the causeway, as you enter).
- 4 Konstanz** The region's informal capital is home to some great restaurants and the controversial rotating Imperia – a statue of a courtesan holding a pope and an emperor in her hands (pictured above).
- 5 Meersburg** Climb the steep steps up to the fortress in this picturesque town that looks as though it was plucked from the pages of a storybook.
- 6 Zeppelin Museum, Friedrichshafen** Forget the slightly tacky promenade and check out a piece of aviation history in this striking museum ([www.zeppelin-museum.de](http://www.zeppelin-museum.de)).





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## DIVING AND SNORKELLING

◀ If you can swim, you can snorkel – thus opening up a whole new world. Pick the right spots and you might be swimming with hundreds of species, from luminous corals and spiky urchins to bright parrotfish and graceful turtles. Once you've gained water confidence, you could learn to dive and delve deeper into the marine world. You can learn all over the world – though be sure to pick a certified guide.

### Snorkel the Red Sea, Egypt

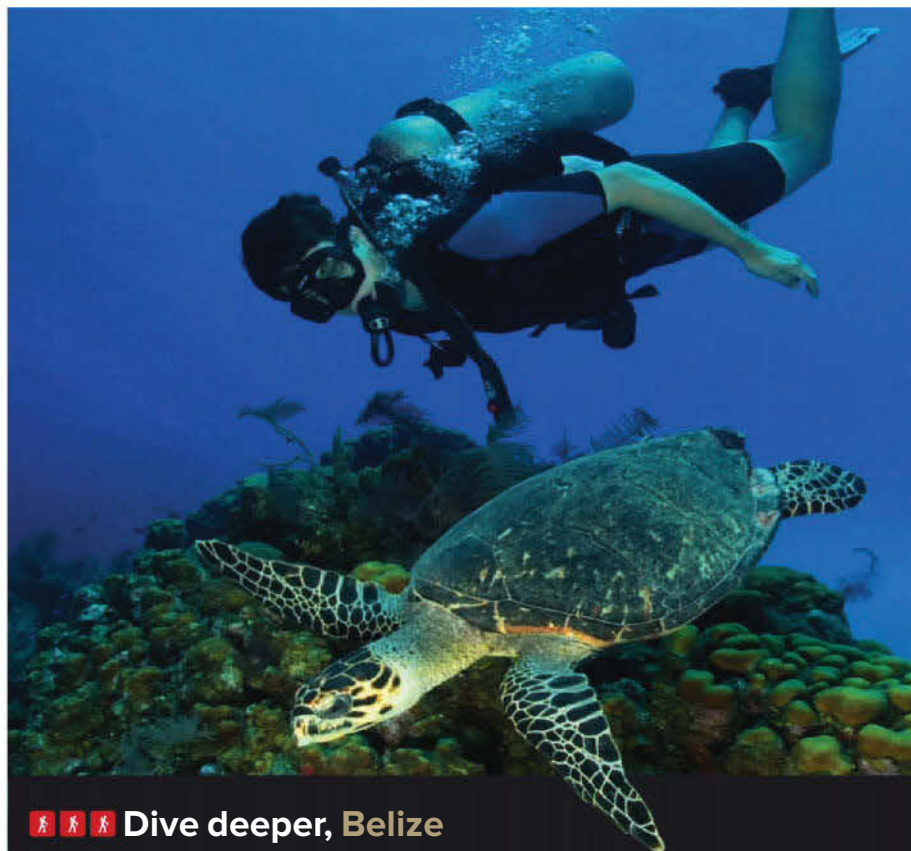
The world's northernmost tropical sea is a super snorkel spot. These waters nurture more than 800 species of fish, which dart between luminescent corals. Even better, there are great shallow reefs that you can reach straight from the beach, so no need to take a boat. For the best coral, head to sites just outside Dahab (the Canyon, Blue Hole) or snorkel from the sands of pristine Ras Mohammed National Park.

**GET STARTED:** Take sea shoes – the seabed can be rather rocky.

### Learn to dive in Koh Phi Phi, Thailand

You could learn to dive in a local pool – but where's the fun in that? More exhilarating is studying subaqua in warm but safe tropical waters, where even your first plunge might yield sightings of colourful fish. Koh Phi Phi, on Thailand's southern Andaman Coast, is a great choice. Practise in a calm chest-deep sea, progressing to great dives around the karst shores, where sharks and turtles lurk.

**GET STARTED:** A PADI Open Water course takes about four days to complete; this qualifies you to dive to 18m.



### Dive deeper, Belize

The UNESCO-listed Belize Barrier Reef – the second-largest in the world – has exceptional diving for all abilities; it's home to over 100 coral species and 500 types of fish. More experienced divers should try a liveaboard trip, in order to access deeper, remoter dive

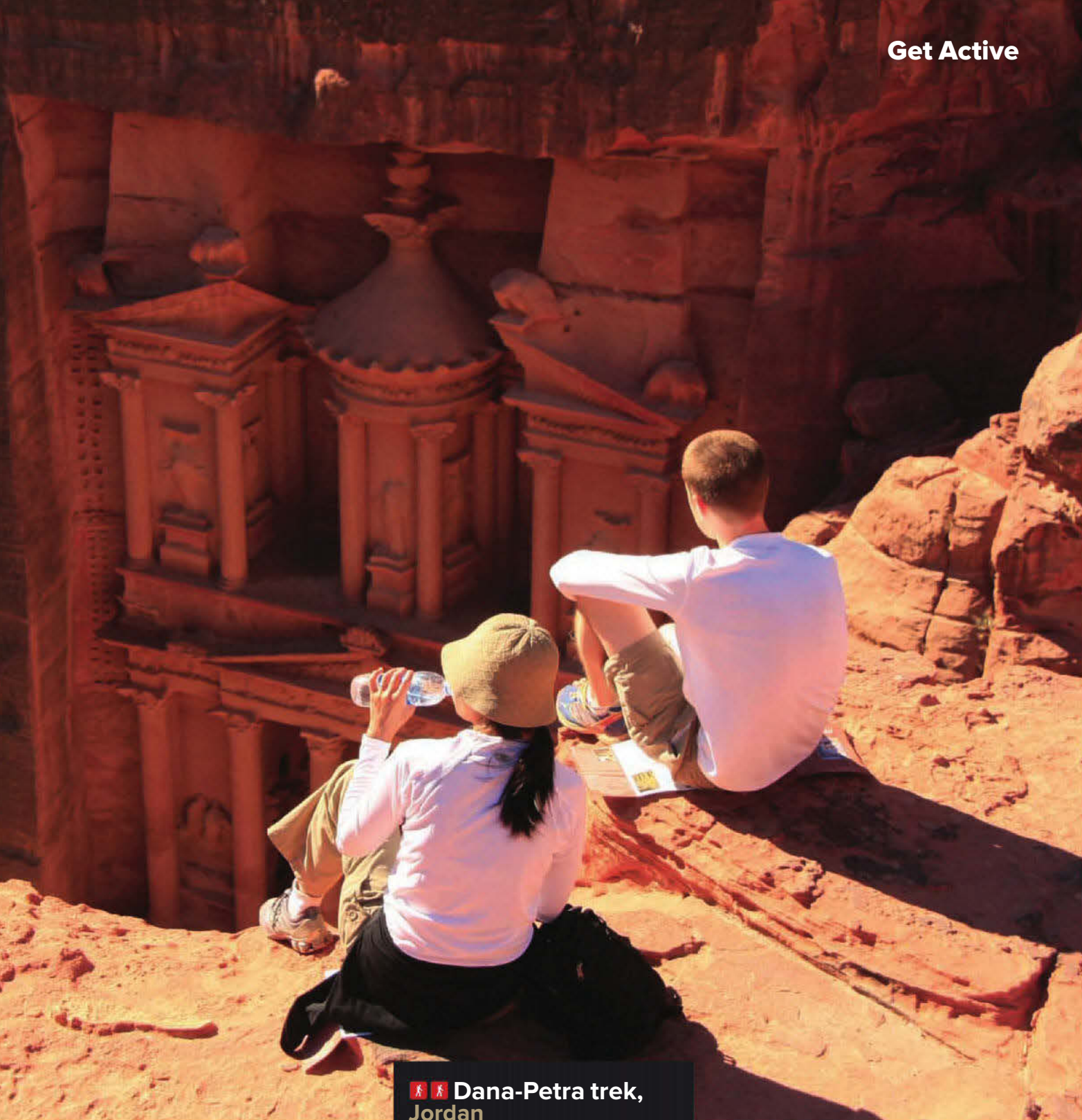
sites: week-long voyages might visit Lighthouse Reef, the famed Blue Hole and Turneffe Atoll, and usually include unlimited day dives as well as a dark dive each night.

**GET STARTED:** Water temperature is usually 25-28°C; a 3mm wetsuit is recommended.

## WALKING

Walking is the most universal of activities: tug on a decent pair of boots and you're good to go. Also, the slow pace and ability to off-road makes walking the best way to get stuck into a destination, no skills required (apart from a bit of stamina). Novices should consider flatter routes and centre-based trips (so there's less pressure to press on). Altitude, amount of ascent and descent, remoteness of trail and hours on feet per day all increase the difficulty – and satisfaction – factor.





### Dana-Petra trek, Jordan

Up the wilderness factor with a desert walk to one of the world's greatest wonders. This 45km multi-day hike follows Bedouin trails via weaving canyons and dried-up valleys to the carved mountainsides of Petra (*above*). The walking isn't too tough, though it's rugged and remote, and the terrain rises gradually (to 1,100m) to end with fine views over the Lost City. Nights are spent wild camping under the stars.

**GET STARTED:** The trek starts from Dana Nature Reserve and takes five/six days. A guide is essential.

### Annapurna Circuit, Nepal

The challenges of this classic circuit lie in its length (300 undulating kilometres) and its height (peaking at the 5,416m Thorong La). But the pay-off is one of Nepal's most varied treks, which passes lush, terraced fields, surreal lunar landscapes, high Himalaya summits, Tibetan monasteries, flag-strewn stupas and warm teahouse hospitality.

**GET STARTED:** The start point (Besisahar) is about six hours by bus from Kathmandu. The full circuit takes around 21 days. ►

### Amalfi Coast, Italy

Mule tracks, lemon groves and teetering villages characterise the southern coast of the Sorrentine Peninsula, where mountains rise right up from the Med. While the cliffs can be steep, the walking is mostly leisurely: short trails via gorges and ancient ruins are liberally interspersed with cafés and must-stop sea views.

**GET STARTED:** The 8km Path of the Gods (Sentiero degli Dei) is a breathtaking stretch. Hub towns include Positano, Agerola and Praiano.



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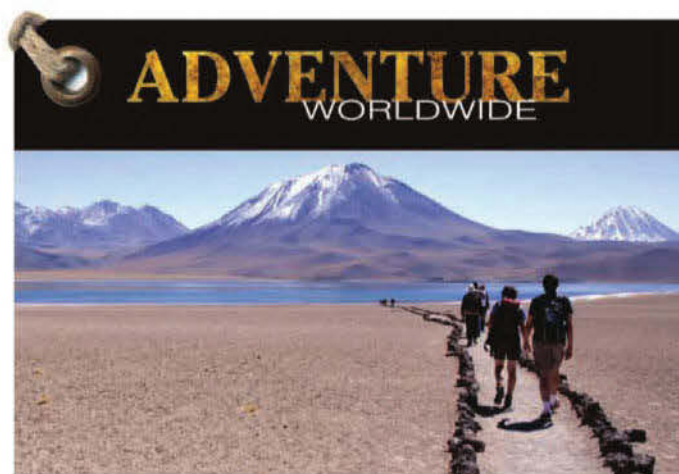
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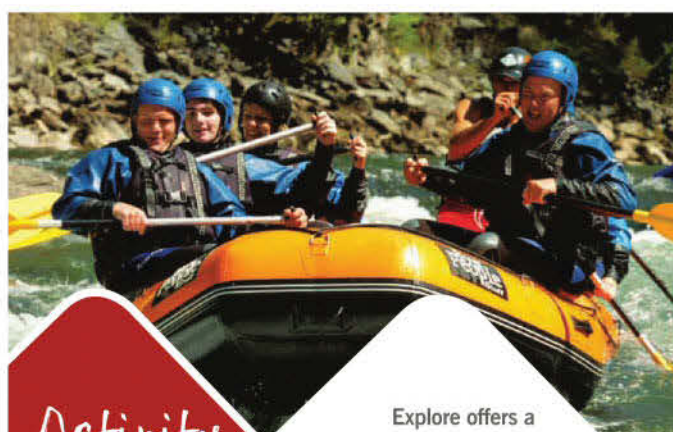
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## WINTER SPORTS

◀ There's still time to squeeze in some snow fun before spring arrives. And while downhill skiing tends to be about adrenaline rush and après ski, there are plenty of options that are more about exploring your destination – whatever your adventure level.

### 🚶🚶🚶 Cross-country ski in Québec, Canada

There's a definite technique to cross-country skiing, but compared to downhill, the sport is a doddle to learn (and falling over hurts far less) – you'll soon be out exploring wintry wonderlands. In Québec, miles of pre-groomed trails riddle the Francophone province, from city parks to snowy peaks; these tracks make the going easier, giving you freedom to look around. It's hard work though – expect to work up a sweat, even if it's 20 below.

**GET STARTED:** Dress in layers – you'll heat up while skiing, but cool quickly when you stop.

### 🐕🐕🐕 Husky sled, Arctic Sweden

For a more extreme icy adventure, try mushing your own husky-sled across the Swedish Arctic. While the dogs might do all the running, you need to learn how to control them – how to steer them across frozen lakes or slow them down on mountain descents. You also need to chop wood, build fires, camp out in forest cabins and cope with the stinging cold.

**GET STARTED:** Kiruna is the hub town of Arctic Sweden. Invest in windproof layers and very warm mittens.

### 🚶 Snowshoe Bulgaria

The easiest way to get active in the snow is to strap on a pair of snowshoes: no lessons required, though adopting a wide cowboy walk will help you avoid tripping over your feet. Use this simple skill to explore the shimmering Vitosha and Rila Mountains. Traverse soft quilts of snow, hike through ancient forests, stop at remote monasteries and keep your eyes peeled for wolves...

**GET STARTED:** Snowshoeing isn't difficult but can be strenuous; prepare for the trip beforehand by doing plenty of walking before you go.



## HORSE-RIDING

◀ **Sauntering through the wilderness on horseback, at one with the animal below you and the world all around, gives a huge sense of freedom. Dependent on your riding experience, you could hack down mountains, join a horseback safari, try a ranch round-up or canter along a beach. Make sure that you get in some practise before you depart – your legs and bottom will thank you afterwards. Also, check whether a helmet and riding boots are provided, and pack comfy riding jeans for a chafe-free experience.**

### **Western riding, USA**

Indulge your cowboy/girl fantasies. Western riding is perfect for everyone, not least because the huge saddles keep you secure. Beginners find it more comfortable, and – let's face it – we all look cool in a Stetson. Stay on an authentic ranch – in Montana, Wyoming or the deserts of the south-west – and you can round up cattle, learn to lasso or simply relax on a trail. **GET STARTED:** Pick the right ranch. 'Working ranches' are primarily livestock businesses; 'guest ranches' farm but focus on tourism; dude ranches are more tourism-orientated.

### **Go Viking, Iceland**

Explore Iceland as locals have for centuries: on horseback. The purebred horses here were brought over by the Vikings more than 1,000 years ago – they're small, tough and fun to ride. Uniquely they also have a fifth gait, the *tölt*, which is incredibly fast and comfortable; the speed makes it better suited to more experienced riders. Trot through rugged lunar landscapes in search of trolls or visit in autumn to join the great sheep and horse round-ups. **GET STARTED:** It's prohibited to bring used and unclean riding kit into Iceland.





## WALKING SAFARIS

**Skip the jeep: on a walking safari you'll feel the full frisson of the African bush. An expert guide (and a ranger with a gun) are essential companions, but it's actually a safe way to experience nature up close, as long as you do what you're told. Exploring on foot isn't always allowed in national parks – you may need to head to private reserves to walk on the wild side.**

### **South Luangwa, Zambia**

South Luangwa NP is the birthplace of the walking safari. The walking isn't tough – distances are short and the pace is slow to allow time to study pugmarks and droppings, to learn about plants from the excellent guides, and to wait while animals do their thing. It's a great choice for safari first-timers, with a chance to see the Big Five – and much more.

**GET STARTED:** The best time to visit is June-August, when landscapes are greener and the weather dry and cooler.

### **Damaraland, Namibia**

In the Nama language, 'damara' means 'those who walked here' – so Damaraland, in north-west Namibia, is clearly an apt place to stroll. This rugged, shadeless countryside is spectacular, dotted with granite kopjes, deep gorges and open plains; it's also an incredible place to track rare black rhino on foot. Head out with a guide and prepare to play Sherlock before being rewarded with a sighting.

**GET STARTED:** Damaraland is best visited May-September. Carry plenty of water. ►

### **Okavango Delta, Botswana**

One of the joys of an exhilarating horseback safari here is being able to get closer to wildlife: you can approach giraffes, canter alongside zebras and track elephants. But, given the critters you might meet (including lions), you need to be an experienced rider so you're capable – if need be – of galloping out of danger.

**GET STARTED:** Expect to spend up to six hours a day in the saddle. The best time to visit is April/May-November.

### **Imfolozi Wilderness Trails, South Africa**

The trails that cross the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park don't offer your average safari. Yes, there's plenty of big game in this expanse of undulating grasslands, acacia savannah and forest – not least a healthy population of white rhino (above). But hiking here is about embracing the scale and power of the

wilderness. It's a no-frills experience: you bathe in the river, drink from the streams, camp under the stars. But you'll never feel more a part of the bush.

**GET STARTED:** Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park is 280km north of Durban. For more, see [www.ekznw.co.za/Trails.htm](http://www.ekznw.co.za/Trails.htm).







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## WATERSPORTS

◀ Evidence shows that being near water makes us feel better. And getting active in it – whether by surfboard, sailboat or swimsuit – not only ups our enjoyment levels, but provides a quirky and restorative way to travel. The ability to swim helps, and local knowledge should be sought before entering unknown waters.

### 🚢 Sail, Croatia

Captaining a vessel takes skill, but even relative novices can have a go on Croatia's calm waters. Easiest is to board a skippered yacht: no qualifications required, and you can be as hands on as you like. More testing is to join a flotilla – you're in charge of a boat, as part of a guided fleet. This offers safety in numbers, as well as the chance to sail to must-see cities, tiny isles, fishing villages and tasty tavernas.

**GET STARTED:** Anyone sailing in Croatia is required to hold a valid ICC RYA Day Skipper Certificate or higher. See [www.rya.org.uk](http://www.rya.org.uk).

### 🚣 Whitewater raft, Peru

The challenge for whitewater beginners isn't learning the skills but mastering the fear. Fortunately, Peru's rivers offer various thrill levels. Crashing down the Sacred Valley, the *Urubamba* (Grade II-III rapids) is popular for short trips from Cusco. The *Apurimac* (III-V) offers longer, rougher rides. Navigating the *Tambopata* (III-IV) involves a remote ten-day jungle voyage – wild water indeed.

**GET STARTED:** Rapid grades can vary, dependent on time of year; it may be necessary to portage around them.



### 🏄 Stand-up paddleboarding, Hawaii

Invented by the Hawaiians, *Ku Hoe He'e Nalu* (stand-up paddleboarding) is a mix of paddling and surfing. It's easy to pick up and, on calm waters, is a wonderful way to navigate coves and bays. First-timers should head to sheltered stretches of

Oahu's North Shore, Pa'ia Bay on Maui and Hanalei Bay in Kauai. Or launch from Kona pier, on Big Island, to paddle while spinner dolphins play.

**GET STARTED:** Wear a life jacket – it only takes a small wave to see you in the drink.



## PEAK-BAGGING

Conquering something large is very satisfying indeed, which is probably why many hikers are drawn to mountains, rather than just flat trails. Having a high goal gives added purpose to a walk and, as the world has many trekking peaks, you don't need to be expert in ropes to feel the summitter's high (see p56 for more).

### 🏔 Mount Toubkal, Morocco

Ambitious walkers can walk up and down North Africa's highest (4,167m) mountain in two or three days, snow permitting. Newbies however should approach at a slower pace – to lessen the effects of altitude, and to spend more time enjoying the lush valleys, Berber villages and mint tea tastings en route.

**GET STARTED:** Toubkal is around 60km from Marrakech. A guide is recommended. In winter climbers will likely need ice-axe and crampons.

### 🏔 Kilimanjaro, Tanzania

The 'Roof of Africa' is the ultimate trekker's challenge with a steady incline meaning it's a 5,895m goal achievable by anyone with a bit of fitness and determination. Treks, via one of five routes, take from six days: guides are compulsory, altitude sickness common, life-changing experiences guaranteed.

**GET STARTED:** The closest airport is Kilimanjaro Int, near the hub towns of Moshi and Arusha.

### 🏔 Aconcagua, Argentina

Aconcagua is the highest (6,962m) summit outside the Himalaya. Ascending it is a three-week undertaking, facing oxygen-parched air, ice spikes, cold camping and steep, soul-sapping scree. At the top, you'll probably need crampons, but it's not really a technical climb: just a battle against the extreme altitude and your own will (pictured above).

**GET STARTED:** Climbing season runs mid-November to mid-March. The nearest major town to the trailhead is Mendoza. ▶



## CYCLING



### Amsterdam

There's officially no better city to whoosh through on two wheels than Amsterdam. The comely Dutch capital tops the 2013 Copenhagenize Index (which rates cities by bike-friendliness); it has miles of dedicated trails, slow speed limits and, best, a pro-bike attitude. Nervous peddlers

should avoid bike lanes on the main thoroughfares, which will be busy with local cyclists. Head for greenbelt and riverside routes for more relaxing rides. **GET STARTED:** Amsterdam has many bike rental shops; prices start from about €8 (£6.60) a day.

Post-Olympics, the number of UK residents cycling was up 40%. No surprise – there are few greener, more engaging ways to travel. The fitness needed for a cycling trip depends on how far you plan to pedal, and over what terrain. Short pootles in flat cities or along rivers require little experience; to cycle 100km a day in the mountains, do plenty of pre-trip practise.

### Nga Haerenga, New Zealand

Nga Haerenga – The New Zealand Cycle Trail – is a 2,500km network of bike pathways; when fully completed in early 2014, it will encompass 23 off-road 'Great Rides'. The routes are diverse, both in scenery and difficulty – ranging from gentle pedals along historic railroads to more advanced biking amid active volcanoes. They all have one thing in common, though: they showcase the best of NZ's culture, landscapes and heritage. **GET STARTED:** For routes, see [nzcycletrail.com](http://nzcycletrail.com).

### Mekong Discovery Trail, Cambodia

Geared towards intrepid mountain bikers, the rugged Mekong Discovery Trail stretches for 180km across the country's rarely visited north-east corner. You'll get a good workout and also the chance to stop at remote riverside communities, sleep at homestays and spot rare wildlife, such as the endangered Mekong River dolphin. **Get started:** Your start point, Kratie, is 350km north-east of Phnom Penh; buses take around five hours. See [www.tourismcambodia.com](http://www.tourismcambodia.com).

## KAYAKING

There are many modes of kayaking, from serene floats down streams to strenuous battles with waves and rapids. On gentle waters, anyone can give it a try: it's easy to pick up and doesn't require high fitness levels. Kayaking is also a great way to get to gorge bottoms, sea caves and bays that others just can't reach – just be sure to head out in the right kit (buoyancy vest, spray-skirt, helmet) with qualified instructors.

### Halong Bay, Vietnam

Legend has it that Halong Bay was created by dragons, sent down by the gods. Fortunately there are no such beasts in the water these days, which makes the calm, island-dotted, UNESCO-listed inlet ideal for

easy and magical paddling. There are some currents to be aware of, but follow a good guide and you can safely explore karst caves and hidden coves at a delightfully languid pace (pictured below). **GET STARTED:** Halong Bay is 200km east of Hanoi. Cat Ba Island is a good base.



### Baja California, Mexico

Sea kayaking can be choppy but it's worth risking a few waves in the waters off Baja: they're a whale playground. The Sea of Cortez and Magdalena Bay attract a wealth of cetaceans – from friendly greys to enormous blues – and there's no more intimate or less intrusive way to view them. **GET STARTED:** The best times for kayaking are Oct-Nov and March-May: warm and calm.

### Scottish Sea Kayak Trail, Scotland

Europe's first long-distance paddle route stretches 500km from the Isle of Gigha in the south up to Ullapool. It's a wild-west-coast showcase, taking in bird-flocked cliffs, whales and dolphins, and wild camps warmed by a whisky or two. Those with less time can pick a section: perhaps alongside Argyll and Bute, a county so coastally convoluted it has 5,000km of shore – more than all of France. **GET STARTED:** [www.scottishseakayaktrail.com](http://www.scottishseakayaktrail.com).



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# Visit Malaysia in 2014

*The four reasons that 2014 is Visit Malaysia Year*

**W**arm waters, white sandy beaches, buzzing cities, rare wildlife and tasty cuisine – Malaysia combines the best of

South-East Asia and 2014 is **Visit Malaysia Year**. Stretching from the mainland Peninsula to Malaysian Borneo, it's a natural playground for you to indulge your passions, whether they are cultural, natural, spiritual or playful – or a combination of all four.

## Cultural wonder

Capital Kuala Lumpur, your first stop, might be electric with modern life – centred around the glass bullets that are the Petronas Towers – but traditional Malay life can still be found among Kampung Baru's wooden houses and street stalls. Sample some local favourites, like the fragrant rice dish *nasi lemak*.

Outside the capital, Penang Island's UNESCO World Heritage site of George Town is full of architectural ghosts from its historic past. Meanwhile Melaka's history as a Chinese, Portuguese and Arabian trading port is still felt in a melting pot of culture and cuisine.

Another highlight is to stay with the indigenous Sabah and Sarawak people.

Travellers can organise a visit with a host family in a *kampong* (traditional village) or a homestay at a tribal longhouse.

## Get beached

Of course, Malaysia's 800-plus islands offer beach-dwellers and water-babies endless opportunity. The Terengganu islands alone have miles of postcard-perfect white-sand beaches for you to squidge between your toes.

Those keen to get in – and under – the water will soon discover why divers rate Malaysia so highly. The island of Sipadan is a word-class spot for turtles, sharks and vertigo-inducing coral walls, while Labuan Marine Park is the resting place of wrecks – and the marine life that now call them home.

## Have a wild adventure

For thrill seekers of all abilities, Malaysia offers an unforgettable experience. Your wanderlust can have you scaling 4,095m Mt Kinabalu, taking in the fauna and flora of Taman Negara National Park from its network of canopy walkways or exploring Deer Cave at Gunung Mulu National Park. For those who like more of an adrenaline buzz, Malaysia's rivers – like the Kuala Kubu Bharu – offer

a wide range of whitewater adventures.

A visit to the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary in Sabah will put you in the natural habitat of the indigenous proboscis monkey – the mascot for Visit Malaysia Year 2014 – as well as Sumatran rhino and Asian elephant. Just as endangered are the orang utans of Sepilok Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre or the Malaysian tiger that have made the Royal Belum Rainforest their home.

## Indulge yourself

Once you've finished hanging with the wildlife, then start getting back in touch with yourself. Malaysia's endless number of tiny islands are the perfect setting for some serious relaxation, whether pampering yourself with local healing rituals on one of Langkawi's 99 islands or taking in the scenery from a cruise-boat deck. Or you can enjoy a spot of retail therapy among the bustling boutiques of Melaka's Jonker Walk or the heady atmosphere and street food of Penang Island's night market.



For more information go to **[www.tourism.gov.my](http://www.tourism.gov.my)**



# FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

**W**e spend at least a third of our three-hour border crossing into Tajikistan from Uzbekistan performing a deliriously staged act of packing/unpacking our mountains of food and cooking utensils, much to the delight of the beaming custom officials. Finally though we're catching a small battered bus to Konibodom, the starting point for our adventure though the Fann Mountains and on to the capital Dushanbe.

At Konibodom, we hop onto a *marshrutka* (minibus) to Khujand, 80km to the west. From there the road to the Fann Mountains – and a 5am start – takes us to one of the oldest cities in Tajikistan, the 2,500-year-old Istaravshan. We are welcomed there by a scorching midday sun that heats the derelict bus station white-hot and makes us suffocate in a haze of warm exhaust.

Struggling for air, we make our way to the old town, an amazingly well-preserved display of traditional architecture. From there, we then head for the bustling bazaar, truly explosive in its Tuesday apparel. We wind through an anthill maze oozing with colour and scents that swamp our tongues in acrid smells. The fumes of the grills – where *shashliks* (mincemeat skewers) are being roasted – mix with the meat cuts that have been hanging since dawn at the butchers' stalls, and blend with the more subtle aromas of dry fruits and spices. Everywhere, warm smiles light up wizened faces the colour of rich bronze, and words of welcome echo in the never-receding kerfuffle.

But time is running out, and the long road to the mountains still awaits us. We begin to

■ Your Story

## The long and winding roads: traversing Tajikistan

**Marie-Laure Parsy**  
describes her intrepid trip through northern Tajikistan and the Western Pamirs



bargain our way to Aini, the steeply priced starting point of our Fann Mountain trek. People throng around us. Low-pitch Persian-accented voices raise with indignation among the local menfolk. A feeble-looking old man with a drooping figure casts us a surprisingly sharp glance while he treads past us. In quick motion, he shows us with six fingers the local price to the mountains.

Sixty *somonis*, 30 puzzled ebony looks and a deal later, we hit the road in a prehistoric vehicle that coughs on the slopes and needs regular cooling; we stop several times to splash cold water under the cowl and treat its mechanical tuberculosis, while large trucks weave their way down towards the south Afghan border.

The road is lumpy and shakes us hard until we reach the pass. At Pasrud, we finally reduce our production of greenhouse gases and start our walk along the Pasrud Darya Valley. The landscape is brusque and austere. Bold stratas of colour across the ashy slopes bring nuances of copper, orangeade and sugar. Turquoise lakes in hidden valleys make for rare gems on the rough silver peaks.

Two weeks and some altitude sickness later, we trek our way back to civilisation and bargain a taxi ride though Zarafshan to the capital Dushanbe. Shortly after leaving,





**Tangerine Tajikistan**  
"Bold stratas of colour  
across the ashy slopes  
bring nuances of copper,  
orangeade and sugar"

seven other passengers – left on the road by a car breakdown – join our expedition, just in time for us to go through the Anzob Tunnel, the most direct route to the capital.

Imagine facing heavy traffic in a pitch dark under-construction tunnel, several metres underground, your driver distracted by the passenger straddling his lap, non-stop Muslim prayers on the radio, and you'll be quite close to the reality of Anzob.

Five asphalt-less kilometres of unfinished tunnels stand between us and the air. On walls raw from manual labour, dusty bulbs cast their ghostly light on moving shadows

drilling worm-shaped holes through the earth. Our 4WD waltzes in the dark, waddling on the butchered ground to avoid the scaffolding, pot-holes and bumping traffic streaming the other way.

One of my fellow passengers grips the door handle senselessly, another blinds himself with his hands and, with each bounce, a third empties his stomach yet another time. After 20 minutes of torture, a light pierces the dark in the distance. We stop for a few minutes on a hard shoulder to care for one of our passengers, cold with sweat and stiff in panic, before sending our car back onto the track.

The road snakes and slides. The monotonous voice of the preacher tugs at the fragile strings of our shattering sanity. And then the others begin to collapse... the two hours to Dushanbe are going to feel very long indeed...

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# LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, Jakarta essentials; the roar of the technological dinosaurs; playing chicken with a racing bull

## ◀ Life-changing travel

I loved the special edition issue. [Dec 2013/Jan 2014]. The '20 Travel Experiences to Change your Life' was such an excellent list – it's so true that the many experiences it listed have indeed changed my life and the way I look at the world. Too often these lists are just of cities, monuments, national parks or countries but in fact it's experiences not 'sights' that are so important – it doesn't actually matter where you do them, as long as you have that type of experience. Then any future experiences you have will be even greater as a result.

Additional experiences for such a list? Perhaps travelling without an itinerary or pre-planned destination. But it was a comprehensive list, and we should all ensure each trip we do covers at least one aspect of it!

**Kathy, posted on the Wanderlust website**

## More dinosaurs

I was prompted to write to you after reading the Sir Ranulph Fiennes' interview [Dec 2013/Jan 2014] – because he isn't the only technological dinosaur out there. I'm a member of a six-man walking group that meets every Wednesday, rain, wind or shine, to wander the mountains of Snowdonia, Cumbria or the Peak District (all accessible from the Wirral). We are all retired and in our late 60s, so it's a bit like *Last of the Summer Wine* – we put the world to rights while enjoying

## ★ STAR LETTER ★ Travel mysteries

I saw the Marfa lights in the late 90s [in reference to the Oct 2013 issue: '20 Mysteries Worth Travelling For'].

It felt eerie standing in the desert watching the lights bob and weave in the distance – no way could they be car headlights or planes.

Then the ground began to shake, and there was a distant rumble and the lights of a train appeared in the darkness.

I was terrified that I'd parked my car on the rail line for a minute!

**Matthew Lightfoot (LS13), posted on the Wanderlust website**

good company, great countryside and some fairly strenuous exercise.

None of us is involved in web-based social networking (or 'anti-social networking'), nor do we possess devices such as iPods, iPads or tablets. In fact, Derek has only recently deigned to get a PC of his own, even though he used to be managing director of a major telecommunications company. John, a retired pharmacist, has never had a TV – he prefers listening to radio. And I have steadfastly refused to get a mobile or car phone.

Having spent so much time on the phone when I was at work, I relish being relieved of its tyranny now that I'm retired. To my mind, whoever it was

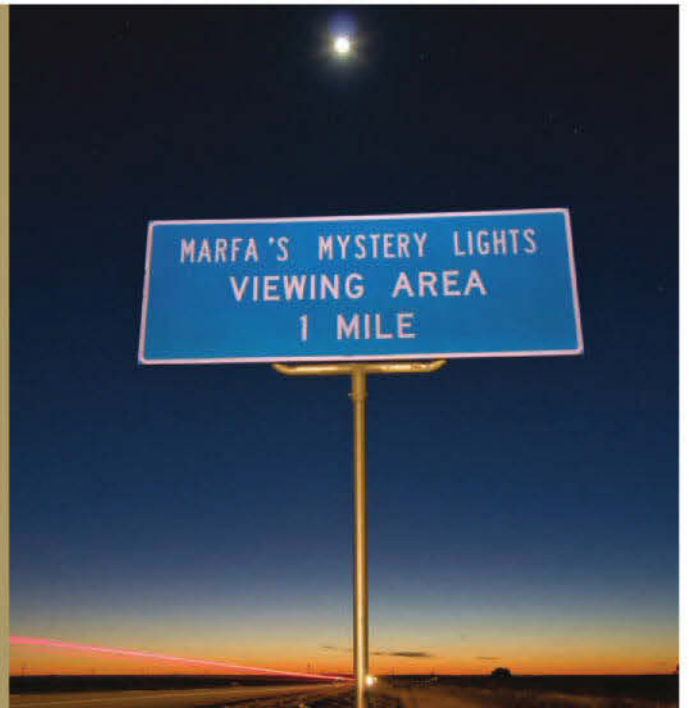
said that 'the phone is a device that allows other people to interrupt you at their own convenience' had it spot on.

**Mike Horgan, Wirral**

## A jaunt in Jakarta?

Having lived here for nine years, as your recent article states [*First 24hrs: Jakarta*, Oct 2013 issue] I can confirm that Jakarta has plenty of things that can be enjoyed by those who stopover here. Pulau Seribu (the Thousand Islands) can be a break from the city's polluted atmosphere. Remember there are two kinds of islands here. The made-for-tourists ones and the others, called island villages, where Jakartans live.

**kratkatao, posted on the Wanderlust website**



## WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time around, congratulations to Matthew!





## ■ Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



**Vietnam**  
**Sarah Manuel**  
spent two weeks  
exploring the  
southern regions of this  
South-East Asian gem

**The highlights:** Tucking into amazing fresh fish and seafood everyday.

**Must see:** The Mekong Delta is a beautiful place to explore – the landscape, food and the friendly people all combine to make a relaxing stay.

**Top tip:** Always carry your raincoat – you never know when the torrential rain will arrive. In Saigon, just walk confidently but carefully to cross the road – the bikes will



avoid you. We found hotels often wanted to give us a different room to the one we had booked; they'd try to pass this off as an upgrade. Staying firm but polite tended to work. **Cautionary tale:** The food markets aren't to Western ethical standards – frogs skinned alive was a little too much for me.

**I wish I'd known...** Three days in Saigon was not going to be long enough.

## This month you have been mostly...



Planning to cycle to Istanbul. I'm unfit and overweight and used to having my husband lead the way, so it'll be a real challenge. [hmoat01](#)



Really enjoying Nick Boulos's Uzbekistan article. Had no idea monobrows considered sign of beauty. [@iamKattyG](#)



Witnessing a faux marriage in Vegas hosted by 'Elvis', who then sang 'Viva Las Vegas'. Brilliant. [Carmen13](#)



Looking to go back to India later in the year and hopefully Turkey for a week in August. [Paul Finnegan](#)



Delighted to see the new @wanderlustmag featuring our Cappadocia on Assignment

feature! Especially pleased with my DPS :) [@SorchHolloway](#)



Going to Cuba then a trip to Moscow when we get back... [keithruffles](#)



Reading @wanderlustmag and getting excited for my trip to Thailand. [@TomFoster88](#)



Exploring Kenya and Zanzibar!! [Robert Williams](#)



Planning a road trip! [@when\\_in\\_room](#)



Investigating a Borneo trip. Trying to convince my hubby that a trip would be an awesome idea. The caves sound amazing.

[STORMCAT](#)



Off to go and live and work in Sydney, Australia in 18 days' time eeeeeee! [Fiona B](#)

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

### Thundering hooves

[Stuart Forster](#)

"This photo shows Kambala racing near Mangalore in the Indian state of Karnataka. It's a popular sport in the coastal region between Karnataka and Kerala, drawing huge crowds. Pairs of bulls are raced on specially prepared tracks, in river beds or fields. I was told the sport's origins go back centuries, as a way of softening arable land between crops. Some of the races give bonus points to riders who spray banners hanging above the track.

"To photograph this, I stood at the end of the track as the bulls thundered towards me; not something Health & Safety would recommend, but effective."



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# SACRED STEPS

Mud-walled villages, temple ruins, hilltop forts, astounding landforms – although just outside Mumbai, the Western Ghats of northern Maharashtra couldn't feel much further from Bollywood bling

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **DAVID ABRAM**









It all started with a knock at the door and a bag of fruit. My neighbour, Pilot, who flies 747s to India a couple of times a month, had come to deliver a consignment of ripe Alphonso mangos, purchased the previous day in a Mumbai street market. They smelt of tropical sunshine and tasted sublime.

Between slurps of sticky mango juice around our kitchen table, the conversation turned to a passion the two of us share in common: travel in off-track parts of India. “Hey,” said Pilot “have you ever been to those

mountains just outside Mumbai? Air traffic control had us flying figure-of-eights over them for ages last week and they look amazing.”

A quick search on GoogleMaps confirmed the mountains in question were the northern extremity of the Western Ghat range, which runs in parallel with India’s coastline all the way from Gujarat to the southernmost tip of the subcontinent at Kanyakumari. In the state of Maharashtra, they peak at 1,646m – not exactly Himalayan proportions, but a good notch higher than Ben Nevis. Further research revealed many of their summit ridges were littered with gravity-defying forts, ruined temples and rock-cut cave shrines linked by networks of ancient pilgrimage trails.

I couldn’t believe that despite having passed through them several times I’d never paid much attention to these enigmatic, yellow-brown giants, known locally as the Sahyadris. Six months later, in the wake of the monsoons, with traces of greenery still in the verges and cauliflower-topped clouds building inland, Pilot and I were on our way to remedy this neglect.


We’d met in Mumbai, and set off into the mayhem of city traffic in a hire car with our driver, Lakshman. It took a couple of hours to break out of the gridlock. After a century and a half of confinement to the land reclaimed by the British, the Maharashtran metropolis has finally burst across the plains to its east. Giant skyscrapers, shopping malls, overpasses and huge hoardings advertising gated residences with rooftop pools are springing up alongside the recently built eight-lane expressway.

India has entered a new age, though it’s one I’m always keen to leave behind as soon as possible when I visit. Which is why a broad grin spread across my face as we finally turned off the highway and started bumping along country lanes towards the dramatic wall of mountains up ahead.

Surging sheer from the plain, the Sahyadris form an imposing barrier between the Konkan Coast and higher, drier Deccan Plateau beyond them – a line of angular peaks standing shoulder-to-shoulder like a cordon of giant, square-jawed sentries. After weeks of planning and a very long journey, the first target on our hit list – Prabalgad Fort – was finally in our sights.

Prabalgad is an outlier of the main range. In centuries past it was used by the region’s ruling dynasties as a citadel from which to dominate the trade artery stretching across the plain beneath it. We’d chosen the mountain because of its distinctive form. Shaped like a giant rhinoceros, the massif has a weird, conical ‘horn’ on its north side – the Kalavantin Pinnacle – which used to serve as a lookout post. I’d come across photos of it online and had been intrigued by the ladder of steps snaking up its near-vertical side. ►





**High adventures**  
Climbing Kalavantin  
Pinnacle from  
Prabalgad; (*far left*)  
visiting the cave shrine  
at Harishchandragad;  
(*left*) Adivasi women  
collect water;  
(*previous page*) gazing  
over Malshej Ghat from  
Harishchandragad





**Maharashtra  
in micro**  
In Bhimashankar,  
monkeys and  
sadhus populate  
the temples; goods  
are carried to  
remote villages  
by wooden pole







**Hosts on a hillside**  
The Bhutambara family offer simple lodging in Prabalmachi

## 'It felt like arriving in an Indian Eden – fruit trees and banana groves bordered fields of cattle and goats: it was hard to believe the squalid fringes of Mumbai were only 14km away'

◀ To climb the rock tower, however, we first had to get to the village clustered below its base, on what is known locally as a *machi* – a kind of mountain balcony of cultivable land 300-350m wide. At an elevation of 400m, machis are invisible from below, and tend to be overshadowed by huge cliffs that ensure a steady supply of water.

The resulting fecundity was much in evidence as we toiled through the heat of late afternoon to reach the rim of the hidden veranda. After the traffic of the expressway, arriving in Prabalmachi village felt like arriving in an Indian Eden. Fruit trees, banana groves and stately old banyans bordered dark-soiled fields grazed by herds of sleek cattle and goats. Colourful birds flitted between the branches overhead and bees were busy in the flowers. It was hard to believe the squalid fringes of Mumbai were only 14km away as the crow flies.

Most of the machi villages in the Sahyadris are inhabited by Adivasi communities – the so-called tribal or indigenous inhabitants of peninsula India. For centuries, the Adivasis seem to have been little affected by the political and cultural changes sweeping up and down the nearby road, collecting cliff honey, forest fruit and bush meat, and growing subsistence crops of millet and rice. Lately, however, their villages have been haemorrhaging young folk to the city.

One such migrant was the eldest son of our hosts for the night, the Bhutambara family. Nilesh Bhutambara had studied computer

sciences at college – the first ever graduate from Prabalmachi – and found a salaried government job in distant Chennai (Madras). Realising from trekkers' blogs that interest in Prabalgad Fort was building online, he created a little website to publicise the bunkhouse his family have set up to earn a few extra rupees – a great example of a low-impact, grass-roots tourism initiative.

With Nilesh acting as a translator on the mobile from the other side of the country, his brother-in-law, Kisan, showed us to a neatly painted little room decorated with pictures of Hindu gods and Bollywood stars. After a cooling bucket bath (the village lacks running water and only has an intermittent electricity supply), we settled down to a *thali* of wonderfully fragrant, spicy aubergines and rice infused with aromas of fresh curry leaves and wood smoke. Pilot bagged the room. I bedded down on my camping mat in the yard outside, under the starriest of skies, and fell asleep listening to a cacophony of frogs and cicadas.

They were still chirruping madly at 5am the following morning when I was awoken by Kisan carrying a tray of tea and *kande pohe* – a traditional Maharashtran breakfast made of beaten rice, freshly grated coconut, lime juice, green chillies and coriander leaf. Thus fortified, we stumbled through the inky darkness with Kisan leading the way, headtorch beams periodically illuminating the eyes of ►









**Holy hiking**  
Climbing the sacred  
steps in the Sahyadris



◀ sleepy water buffalo as the path cut uphill through the forest.

By the time we'd climbed clear of the trees and reached the summit ridge of the mountain, the first rays of daylight were illuminating the plains below, shrouded in river mist and smoke. A trio of red-headed merlins soared from the crags below us, where the tip of the Kalavantin Pinnacle glowed orange in the foreground, framed by a backdrop of table-topped peaks.

It took another hour of scrambling through boulders and undergrowth to reach the foot of the steps scraped from the sides of the pillar in medieval times. A troupe of black-faced langur monkeys eyed our progress suspiciously from the cliff above, sending up occasional whoops of alarm that echoed through the surrounding rocks. The climb turned out to be every bit as vertigo-inducing as it looked, but was rewarded with another stupendous view.

Gazing at the hulks of newly built tower blocks looming out of the smog on the horizon, I was struck by what a different kind of India we'd spent the past 12 hours in – a far cry from the fumes, dust and clamour most other travellers were waking up to. There wasn't a speck of litter anywhere to be seen and the fresh morning air was filled with birdsong and the scent of forest herbs.

The next mountain on our itinerary was more remote still. Like Prabalgad, Bhimashankar doesn't feature in any guidebooks, despite

being the site of one of the country's holiest Shiva shrines. A tarred road winds to it from the east. But the traditional approach is on foot, via a trail that twists through magnificent jungle and cliffs.

The huge escarpments buttressing Bhimashankar looked all the more intimidating in the gathering dusk. We'd been late setting off, and by the time we reached the machi halfway up we were walking in total darkness. Hundreds of tiny flecks of light sparkled on the forest floor. I thought they were fragments of mica, but they turned out to be spiders' eyes reflecting the light of our torch beams.

Fat rain drops were falling when we finally arrived at the machi village – harbingers of one of the most violent, ear-splitting electrical storms I've ever witnessed. Spectacular flashes of fork lightning soon lit up the cliff. Then the rain started in earnest, cascading in torrents off the terracotta roof tiles. We certainly would not be making it to the hotel that we'd booked for the night outside Bhimashankar.

Luckily, the local lad we'd employed to guide us, Ganesh, had family in the village. Unfazed by the sudden appearance of two foreigners in the middle of a raging tempest, our hosts rustled up a fabulous meal made entirely from produce grown in their own plot. Afterwards, the grandfather proudly showed us the rice mill recently donated to the village by the government.

#### Top dog

Few travellers make it to Harishchandragad – the Mountain of Shiva's Moon (Right) Konkan Kada – 'breathtakingly exotic, like stumbling across a tropical Scottish Cuillin'





“How on earth did they get that heavy kit up here?” wondered Pilot. “It must weigh a few tonnes.” The question was answered the following morning after we’d thanked our hosts and followed Ganesh up the old pilgrims’ trail. Travelling downhill in the opposite direction were two young men carrying a spare part for the mill on a long bamboo pole. It had been driven to the top of the mountain on the road, like everything else the machi villagers needed that they couldn’t make themselves, and was now being carried down to the village.

Bhimashankar proved a compelling change of atmosphere after the long ascent. Saffron-clad sadhus lazed outside its 18th-century Shiva temple, reached via a long, stepped walkway lined with stalls of flower offerings and freshly made milk sweets. Pilot and I ordered chai at a teashop, and watched the comings and goings in the shrine before beginning our long descent back to our waiting car and driver.

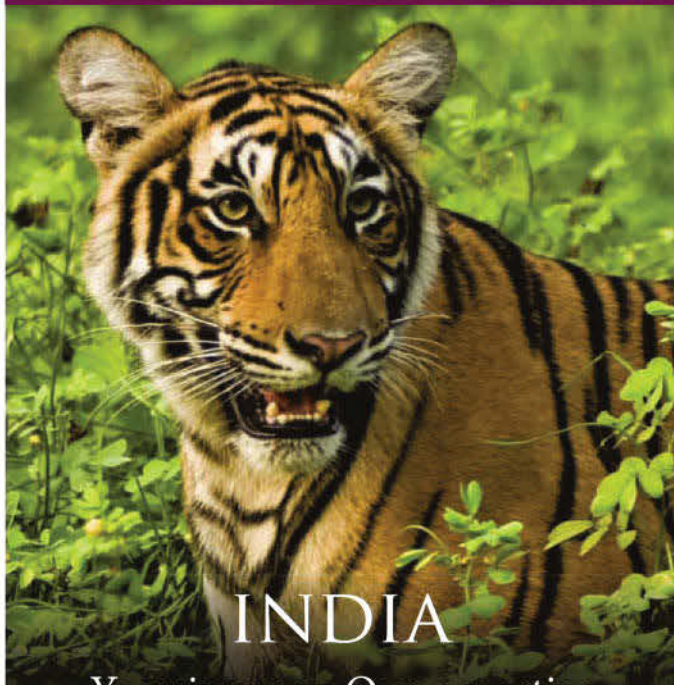
Rather than race to another uncertain destination as the light faded, we decided to stop for the night in a government hotel at a place called Malshej Ghat, a couple of hours’ north, near one of the major passes through the Sahyadris. Handily situated close to the trailhead of our next day’s route, the hotel looked like it had just come through a war, and so did the staff, sprawled on benches when we arrived (government hotels in India don’t see many customers). But the place soon sprang to life and the hotel employees took on our trekking mission as their own – quite literally. At 5am the next morning, a group of four – including the manager – had mustered in the pre-dawn darkness, dressed in matching purple Maharashtra Tourism tracksuits, to guide us across the nearby dam and onwards to the landform that would turn out to be the most spectacular of our trip: Harishchandragad, the ‘Mountain of Shiva’s Moon’. ►

**‘At 5am, a group had mustered in the pre-dawn darkness – dressed in matching purple Maharashtra Tourism tracksuits – to guide us to the most spectacular landform of our trip’**





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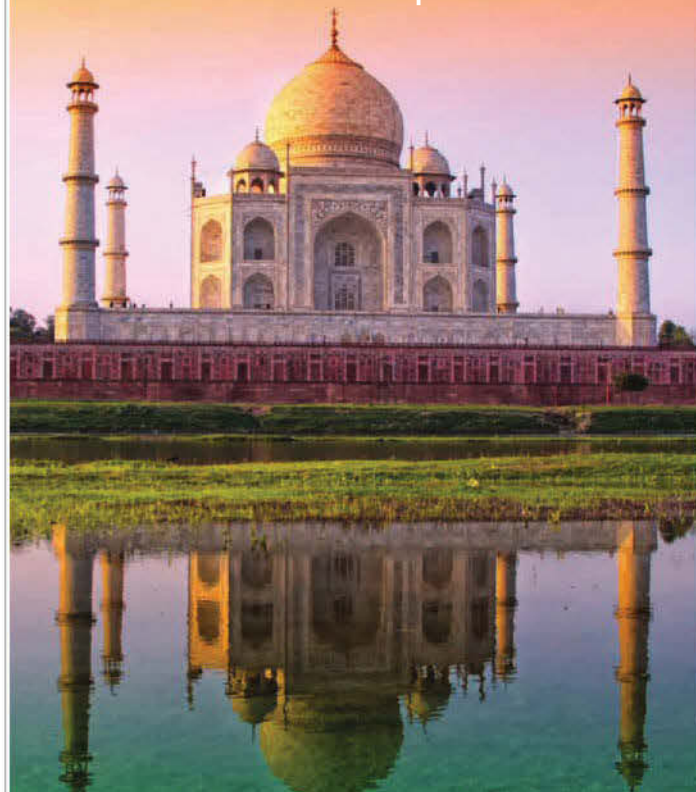
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**Age of apocalypse?**  
To Hindus, the broken pillars of Kedareshwar Cave suggest the world is in an era of discord and destruction

◀ In the wake of the previous night's storm, the weather had grown cooler. The air was less humid, the light crisper. "This is actually starting to feel like a proper holiday!" grinned Pilot as we emerged from the tree canopy into bright sunshine. "My shirt's even dry."

Three hours later, after a lung-stretching haul through forest, we arrived at the hidden plateau at the top of Harishchandragad. Interlaced by streams and smothered in greenery, its focal point is a sloping platform of basalt from whose midst rises an ancient Hindu temple, part hollowed from the bedrock, but with a corn-cob sanctuary tower made from carved masonry placed on top. Caves had been hollowed from the surrounding cliffs, along with bathing tanks of dark-green water for ritual ablutions.

The real show stopper here though was the Konkan Kada. Another 30 minutes' walk across the plateau, the rock curled to a sharp lip, then plunged in a huge, over-hanging cliff to a tangle of dry river beds and scrub a kilometre below. Fluted ridges and towers swept up on either side of the escarpment to an amphitheatre of sharp peaks. Vultures spiralled in the thermals below. It was breathtakingly exotic – like stumbling across a tropical version of Scotland's Cuillin or Torridon, only with a functioning Saxon-era shrine on its summit.

If this were in Europe, the whole area would have been a national park. But there were no waymarked paths or interpretative panels here. Instead of a bothy or refuge, trekkers sleep in the rock-cut cave temples, just like pilgrims have done for thousands of years.

Harishchandragad, however, had saved one final secret for us. Returning to the temple, we came across an intriguingly large cavern hewn from the side of a stream gully. Inside it stood

a monolithic Shiva lingam placed in the centre of a square pond, with the remnants of four pillars surrounding the central shrine. "Kedareshwar Cave!" announced our hotel manager, as one of his boys shed his tracksuit and dived in to worship the phallus. "The pillars are symbols of Hindu *yugs*." He went on to explain that the *yugs* or *yugas* were stages of human history. After each had passed, a pillar is said to have collapsed. Only one – the fourth and final – remained intact: the column corresponding to Kali Yuga, the 'Age of the Apocalypse', characterised by "strife, discord and destruction," Manager Saab intoned, finger raised in the air. This is the era in which Hindu theologians claim we currently exist.

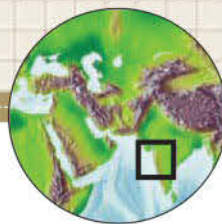
Standing outside the cave in the warm sunshine, surrounded by leafy forest and high ridges lit by clear morning light, I thought of the tower blocks marching across the plains to the west. I recalled the ads for modern apartments that rose amid the fields we'd driven past, where soon bulldozers would be breaking new ground. It was hard not to feel there might be something in the old prophesy.

Were we in Kali Yuga, I wondered? Or at the dawn of a brave new world, as the ads suggest? I guess it depends on which side of India's economic divide you're from. Either way, it was a relief to discover that there remain, high in the Sahyadris at least, places in this country that have kept their heads above the rising tide of modern chaos. And judging by the view of endless peaks receding north, plenty more of them remain to be discovered. ■

*David Abram is a guidebook author and travel writer. He is one of the authors of The Rough Guide to India*



# Maharashtra, India Footnotes



## VITAL STATISTICS

**State capital:** Mumbai  
**State population:** 112 million  
**State language:** Marathi  
**Time:** GMT+5.5  
**International dialing code:** +91  
**Visas:** UK nationals must apply for a visa before entering India (in.vfsglobal.co.uk). Tourist visas are valid for six months from date of issue and cost £92.20, plus postage.  
**Money:** Indian rupee (Rs), currently Rs100 to the UK£. Tipping is expected. ATMs are widespread; not all hotels accept debit or credit cards, so carry plenty of cash.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

### When to go

■ **Winter** – the coolest, driest weather. Best time for Sahyadri trekking is Dec-Jan: humidity levels are lowest, light clearest and temperatures bearable even at midday  
 ■ **Hot season** – too warm for trekking  
 ■ **Rainy season** – downpours and mist; local trekkers' preferred season

### Health & safety

Stick to freshly cooked food, avoid salad and drink purified water (take your own filter). This is a low-risk area for malaria and dengue, but it's still wise to use a mosquito net and DEET-based repellent, especially when travelling around the edges of Mumbai.

### Further reading & information

**Trek the Sahyadris** (Indus, 2011) by Harish Kapadia (harishkapadia.com).

## THE TRIP

The author travelled courtesy of India-specialist **TransIndus** (0844 879 3960, [transindus.co.uk](http://transindus.co.uk)), which offers nine-day trekking trips in the Sahyadri Mountains from £1,375pp on a twin-share basis. This covers flights from the UK, accommodation (including a night at The Verandah In The Forest), guides, transfers and meals.

For those wishing to travel independently, Mumbai-based **Trek Mates India** ([www.trekmatesindia.com](http://www.trekmatesindia.com)) can provide guides and route advice.

### Getting there & around

**British Airways** (0844 493 0787, [ba.com](http://ba.com)) runs frequent non-stop flights from London Heathrow to Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport from £500-600; flight time is 9.5 hours. Public transport (in the form of **local buses, auto-rickshaws and flat-bed three-wheelers**) is available

to all of the trailheads mentioned in this article, though it's usually sporadic, slow and uncomfortable. Consider **renting a car and driver** for the duration of your trip instead. Prices start at around £25-30 a day for a small hatchback, or three times that for a larger, air-conditioned vehicle.

### Cost of travel

India offers **excellent value for money** when it comes to food and accommodation, though the cost of rented cars is comparable with northern Europe. Local guides, which can be recruited in villages, charge between Rs500 and Rs1,000 (£5-10) a day. Allow £1.50-2 for meals in villages and local tea shops, £3-4 in Mumbai.

### Trekking routes & guides

Without a **local guide** it would be near impossible to follow the routes described (with the exception of Prabalgaad, which is straightforward once you've reached the start point). There are **no reliable maps**, and GoogleEarth can only get you so far. If you're not travelling on a packaged trek with a guide, recruit one locally on arrival.

The trailhead for the Prabalgaad route is near the hamlet of Thakkurwadi (see GoogleMaps 18.980568, 73.203142), 50km south-west of Mumbai airport.

For Bhimashankar, you have to get to Khandas village (19.05149, 73.510281), 93km east of Mumbai and follow the Ganpati Ghat path (not the Siddi 'Ladder' Ghat route, which is dangerous because of ill-secured fixed ladders).

Khreshwar village (19.373705, 73.808806), 140km east of Mumbai near Malshej Ghat, is the trailhead for Harishchandragad and the Konkan Kada Escarpment.

### Accommodation

**Prabalgaad Bunkhouse** ([prabalgaad.jigsy.com](http://prabalgaad.jigsy.com)), run by the Bhutambara family, offers very basic dorm accommodation and a shared shower-toilet. Meals are home-cooked and delicious. Count on £10pp half board, plus £6 for your guide.

Neemrana's **The Verandah In The Forest** (Matheran; [neemranahotels.com](http://neemranahotels.com)) provides a welcome spot of luxury in the hills. Think four-poster beds, East India Company prints and a gorgeous veranda with planters' chairs for lazing on. Meals are served at a long antique table, complete with silver candelabras. Doubles from £50.

The **MTDC Malshej Ghat** government hotel ([maharashtratourism.gov.in](http://maharashtratourism.gov.in)) makes up for its very rough edges with exceptionally friendly staff. Opt for one of its spacious and clean 'Super Deluxe' rooms with valley views. Doubles from £20.

### Food & drink

Freshly cooked vegetable *thalis*, with dal, rice, chapattis and all the trimmings, are available in even the most remote villages, in exchange for a donation of around Rs150-200 (£1.50-2) a head. Expect fragrant *kande pohe* (beaten rice with grated coconut, lime and chillies) for breakfast.

### What to pack

Useful items include good trekking shoes, sun cream, a sun hat, mossie repellent, a **water filter**, bags of nuts and raisins to snack on and at least one 3L hydration bladder for your water. Pack lightly.

## 5 THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN



### 1 Matheran is worth a stop

The old British hill station just outside Mumbai, in the heart of the Sahyadris with views to Prabalgaad, is a great place for a spot of R&R between treks, with a particularly lovely hotel.

2 **Mossie nets are handy** My trekking partner took along a very good bivvy net, like a tent, with flexi poles and a sewn-in base.

3 **Slowing down is good** We were continually rushing and could have done with an extra day or two between stages to recover and savour the views.

4 **A water filter is useful** Carry a backpacking water filter with you to save having to lug 4-6L in your pack.

5 **The humidity can be tough** We travelled in November, and for the first few days were dripping wet from the heat. December-February is much less humid.



### More online

Visit [www.wanderlust.co.uk/144](http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/144) for links to more content from the trip

#### ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ **Trekking in Darjeeling** – issue 130
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A photograph of a person lying on their back in a desert, with their arms outstretched. The sand around them is marked with concentric, circular ripples, creating a hypnotic effect. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by reds, oranges, and yellows.

# *Wanderlust* **TRAVEL PHOTOS OF THE YEAR 2013**

Inspirational. Surprising. Moving. Breathtaking. The shots entered in our latest photo competition are all that and more. Over the next 15 pages we display our finalists and reveal the winners of the amateur categories, who'll be off on a photo commission to Jordan. For background stories and judges' comments, go to [travelphotooftheyear.co.uk](http://travelphotooftheyear.co.uk)

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 **THE INDEPENDENT**





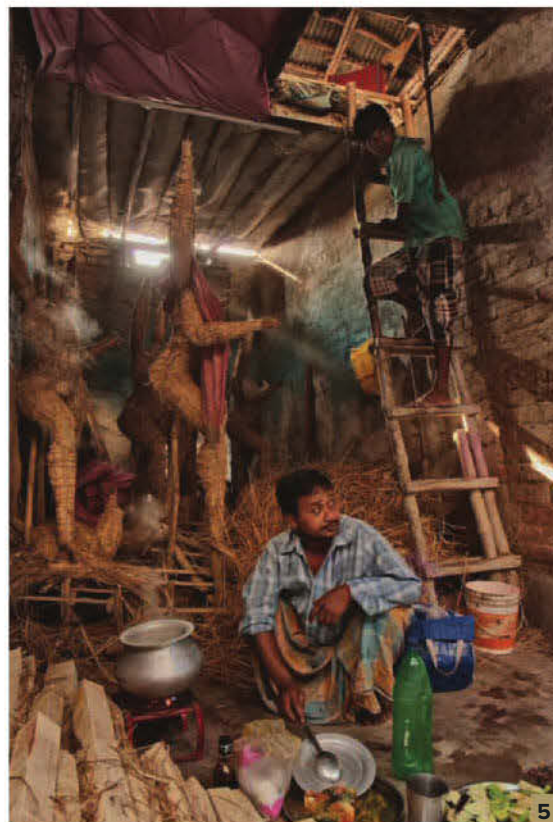
2



3



4



5

**1 Festive fervour**  
**Mathura, India**

*Sahil Lodha*

*Photography student*

Canon EOS 50D,  
Canon EF-S 18-55mm  
lens @ 46mm,  
1/200 sec @ f/11, ISO 100  
(Pictured previous page)

**RUNNER-UP**

**2 Lototo & her village**  
**Loiyangalani, Turkana,**  
**northern Kenya**

*Ben McRae*

*Ocean lifeguard*

Canon EOS 5D MkII, EF  
16-35mm f/2.8L II USM lens,  
1/60 sec @ f/6.3, ISO 200,  
Westcott softbox with  
Canon 580EXII Speedlite,  
triggered by Impact radio  
trigger

**3 Theatre of life**  
**Hyderabad, India**

*Swarat Ghosh*

*Visual designer*

Sony DSC-RX100,  
1/250 sec @ f/2.8, ISO 3200

**4 The holy sip**  
**Kumbh Mela,**  
**Allahabad, India**

*Dr Sanjay Gupta*

*Consultant cardiologist*

Canon EOS 5D MkII, 85mm  
1.8 lens @ 85mm, 1/100 sec  
@ f/2.0, ISO 2500

**5 Sculpture maker**  
**Kolkata, India**

*Gan Chian Mien*

*Construction manager*

Nikon D800, 24-70mm  
f/2.8 lens @ 24mm,  
1/60 sec @ f/8, ISO 3200

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**

**6 Folk painter**  
**Kolkata, India**

*Kushal Gangopadhyay*  
*Service*

Canon EOS 550D, Canon  
EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 IS  
lens @ 34mm, 1/160 sec  
@ f/5, ISO 320









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**7 The workshop at  
the far end of Vietnam  
Cửa Lớn River, Vietnam**

*Mr Jean-Noël Chatelain*

*Retired teacher*

Nikon D90, Nikkor 16-85mm  
f/3.5-5.6 ED lens @ 16mm,  
1/160 sec @ f/14, ISO 800

**8 Kolkata school run  
Ganesh Chandra Avenue,  
Kolkata, India**

*Phil Wingfield*

*Civil servant*

Nikon D80, Nikkor 18-200mm lens  
@ 90mm, 1/20 sec @ f/9, ISO 400

**9 Human & global warming  
Monywa, Myanmar (Burma)**

*Maung Ni Oo*

*Poet & performance artist*

Nikon D800 E, 14-24 mm  
f2.8G lens @ 14mm,  
1/200 sec @ f/8, ISO 200

**WINNER**

**Careful, brother...  
Bagbazar, Kolkata, India**

*Sandipan Mukherjee*

*High school teacher*

Nikon D80, Nikkor 18-105mm  
(f/3.5-5.6) lens @ 90mm, 1/60 sec  
@ f/5.6, ISO 400  
(Pictured on page 6)





## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### 1 Glacier walking Vatnajökull, Iceland

*Lisa Mardell*

*Marketing manager*

Canon 5D MkII, 70-300mm  
f/4.5 DO IS USM lens @ 300mm,  
1/500 sec @ f/8

### 2 X marks the spot Phortse village, Sagarmatha National Park, Nepal

*Jan Košťál*

*Tour guide*

Nikon D700, Nikkor 80-200  
@ 80mm, 2.8 sec @ f/4

### 3 Dead Vlei storm Sossusvlei, Namibia

*John Whitby*

*Semi-retired advisory teacher*

Canon EOS 600, 55-250 zoom  
lens @ 74mm, 1/800 sec @ f/13,  
ISO 100, underexposed by  
2/3 stop

### 4 Methane bubbles trapped in ice Abraham Lake, Alberta, Canada

*Martin Chamberlain*

*Civil servant*

Canon EOS 5D MkII, Canon TS-E  
24mm lens (MkII), 1.5 sec @ f/8,  
ISO 50, Tripod 2 stop graduated  
filter to tone down sky

## WINNER

### 5 Tornado cloud Kross Fjord, Svalbard, Norway

*Andy Barnes*

*Construction project manager*

"I was on the bow of an Arctic  
expedition ship. We were  
nearing the open sea when  
suddenly the cloud formation  
appeared. As quickly as it  
arrived, it disappeared – though  
I managed to get this shot."

Nikon D800, Nikkor AF-S  
24-70mm f/2.8 lens @ 34mm,  
1/200 sec @ f/10, ISO 250









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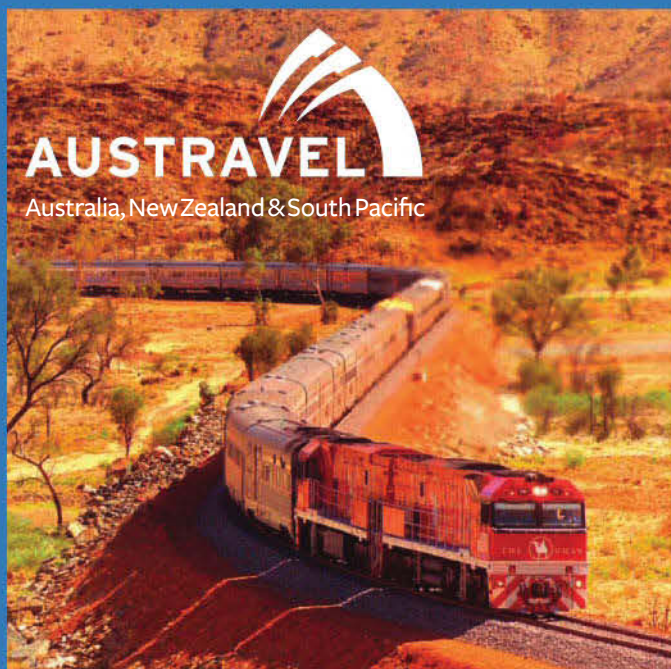
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Tom, Travel Designer



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6



7

**6 Monument Valley**  
**Utah, USA**

*Jon Philpott*

*University administrator*

Canon EOS 5D MkII, Canon  
17-40mm lens @ 40mm,  
1/80 sec @ f/7.1, polariser filter

**7 Jökulsárlón beach at dusk**  
**South-east Iceland**

*Sophie Carr*

*Banker*

Canon EOS 5D MkIII, Canon  
EF 24-70mm f/2.8L USM lens  
@ 30mm, 5 sec @ f/18, ISO 100

**RUNNER-UP**

**8 Starry night at Sennen Cove**  
**Cornwall, England**

*Matthew Longworth*

*Full-time photography student*

Nikon D600, 24-85mm lens @  
24mm, 20 sec @ f/3.5, ISO 1600

**9 Nohoval Cove**  
**County Cork, Ireland**

*John Hall*

*Operations manager*

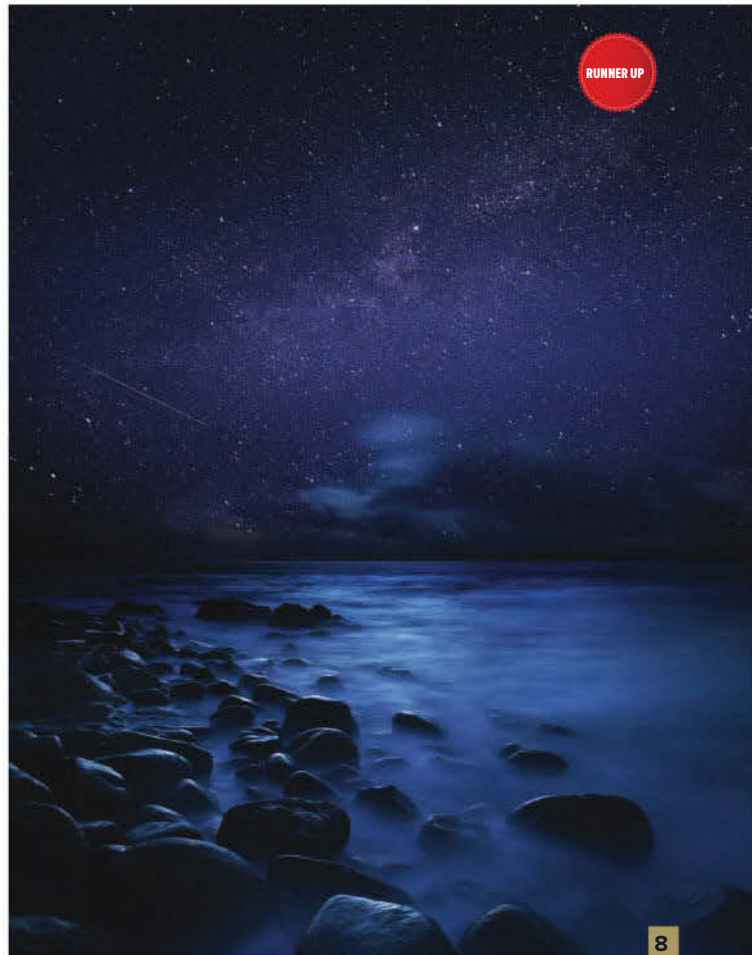
Canon EOS 5D Mk1, Canon  
20-35mm EF lens @ 20mm,  
4 mins @ f/11, 8-stop full-neutral  
density filter and 0.6 neutral  
density grad filter

**10 Coming home**  
**Staithes, North Yorkshire,**  
**England**

*Arka Mukhopadhyay*

*IT consultant*

Nikon D90, Tokina 11-16 f/2.8 lens  
@ 11mm, 30 sec @ f/11, ISO 200,  
BW 77mm circular polariser filter



8



9



10





**1 Natrix maura, water snake**  
São Lourenço da Montaria,  
Viana do Castelo, Portugal

*César Armindo Pereira Torres*

*Police officer*

Nikon D90, Sigma 180mm Macro  
lens @ 180mm, 1/400 sec @ f/7.1,  
ISO 400

**2 Eye of the storm**  
Masai Mara, Kenya

*Alen Lang*

*Consultant*

Canon EOS 7D, EF 24-70 lens @  
70mm, 1/125 sec @ f/11, ISO 6400

**3 Trial of strength**  
Etosha National Park, Namibia

*Graham Love*

*Writer*

Nikon D3S, AF-S Nikkor  
70-200mm f/2.8 ED zoom lens  
plus Nikon 2x converter,  
1/500sec @ f/6.3, ISO 2500

**4 Saddle-billed stork  
with mongoose**  
Kruger, South Africa

*David Cantrille*

*Retired*

Canon EOS 1D MkIV, Canon 300  
F2.8L IS MkII lens, 1/1250 sec @  
f/5.6, ISO 200

**5 Catch me if you can**  
Montasio Massif, Friuli-Venezia  
Giulia, Italy

*Stefano Zocca*

*Agronomist*

Nikon D800, Nikkor AI 135 mm  
f/2.8, 1/1600 sec @ f/8, ISO 400

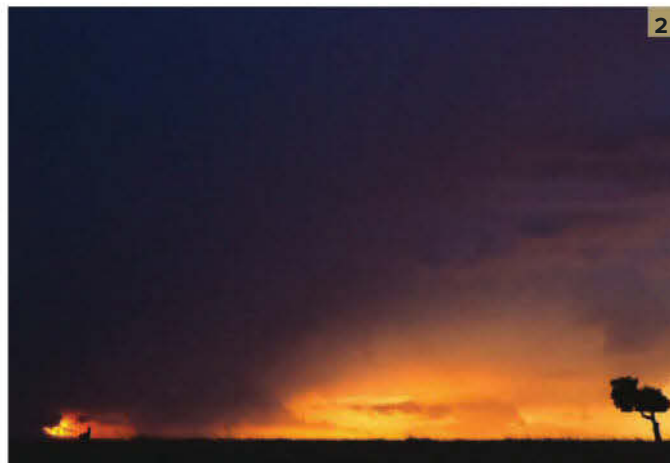
## HIGHLY COMMENDED

**6 Up close and personal**  
South Luangwa, Zambia

*Graham Love*

*Writer*

Nikon D3S, AF-S Nikkor 70-  
200mm f/2.8 ED zoom lens  
plus 2x Nikon converter,  
1/500 sec @ f/5.6, ISO 640













Wildlife

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8



9



10

## WINNER

### 7 Lion on the run Masai Mara, Kenya

*Angela Osborne*  
Accountant

"These elephants were unhappy to share their territory with the Marsh pride of lions. As they chased this large male away, I panned my camera to create this image of the lion fleeing."

Canon 1DX, Canon EF 300mm f/2.8 L IS lens + Canon 1.4x teleconverter @ 420mm, 1/15 sec @ f/40-1/3, ISO 200

## RUNNER-UP

### 8 Great grey owl digging for voles Lake Oulujärvi, Kajaani, Finland

*Neville Turton*  
Chartered surveyor  
Canon EOS 5D MkIII, Canon EF100-400mm L lens @ 400mm, 1/2500 sec @ f/6.3, ISO 3200, exposure compensation +1.33

### 9 End of the chase Masai Mara, Kenya

*Peter Kenny*  
Retired  
Canon EOS 7D, EF100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L lens @ 400mm, 1/20 sec @ f/7.1, ISO 200

### 10 Great white ghost Guadalupe Island, Baja California, Mexico

*Nicholas Benjamin Jones*  
Graphic designer  
Canon EOS 5D MkII, EF8-15mm f/4L Fisheye USM lens @ 15mm, 1/200 sec @ f/13, ISO 400, Subal CD5M2 Housing





1



2



3



4



5



6

**1 Cable car**  
**San Francisco, California**  
*Leung Chak Ho*  
Teacher

Canon EOS 5D MkIII, Canon EF  
70-200mm f/4.0 L IS USM lens @  
185mm, 1/3 sec @ f/13.0, ISO 100

**2 No competition:**  
**the Bernina Express**  
**Between Lago Bianco**  
**and Pontresina, Grisons,**  
**Switzerland**  
*Christopher Marsham*  
Retired financial adviser/teacher

Sony SLT-A99V, Zeiss 24-70mm  
lens, f/2.8 @ 35mm, 1/320 sec  
@ f/13, ISO 250

**3 Across the red planet**  
**Wadi Rum, Jordan**  
*Karsten Wrobel*  
Controller

Sony Alpha 900, Tokina 28-70mm  
@ 28mm, 1/60 sec @ f/8, ISO 100

**4 Wat Arun**  
**Bangkok, Thailand**  
*Michał Konkołowicz*  
Student

Nikon D800, Nikkor 16-35mm  
lens @ 16mm, 1/5 sec @ f/8, ISO  
100, Hitech ProStop IRND 10  
stop ND filter

**RUNNER-UP**

**5 Sydney silhouette**  
**Sydney, Australia**  
*Bart Brouwer*

Human geography student  
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ38,  
2 sec @ f/8, ISO 80

**6 Durga Puja**  
**Maheshwar, Madhya**  
**Pradesh, India**  
*John Devereux*

Graphic designer  
Canon EOS 5D, Canon EF  
16-35mm f/2.8L IS wideangle  
zoom lens, 1/30 sec @ f/2.8,  
ISO 1600





7



8

**7 Blue**  
**London, England**  
*Oscar Rialubin*  
Graphic designer

Nikon D700, Nikon 14-24mm f/2.8  
lens @ 21mm, 0.7 sec @ f/16, ISO  
100, ND8 filter

**8 The waters of Venice**  
**St Mark's Square, Venice, Italy**  
*Ian Park*  
Retired

Pentax Optio 550, 5MP compact  
38-188 equivalent zoom @ 52mm,  
1/154 sec @ f/3.2

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**  
**9 Peaceful life**  
**Bagan Burma (Myanmar)**  
*Maung Ni Oo*

Poet & performance artist  
Nikon D90, 11-16mm lens  
@ 11mm, 1.6 sec @ f/8, ISO 200

**WINNER**  
**Pont Alexandre III**  
**Paris, France**  
*Ulrich Lambert*

IT engineer  
Nikon D90, Sigma 10-20 @  
10mm, 6 sec @ f/8, ISO 400  
(Pictured on page 8)



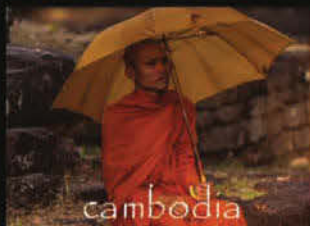
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9



# All Points East

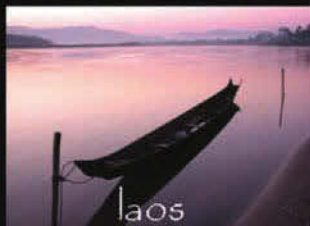
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# POCKET GUIDES

THE BITS OF THE GUIDEBOOK YOU REALLY NEED

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**133** ANTIGUA



**135** PARIS



**137** GLASGOW





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**INSUREANDGO**







# Antigua, Guatemala

Volcanoes and politics have allowed Antigua to preserve its colonial flavour.

**Chris Moss** enjoys a cosmopolitan welcome to the land of the Maya

## **i** Before you arrive

Founded in 1543 as Santiago de los Caballeros, Antigua Guatemala was once the capital of the Captaincy-General of Guatemala, a huge colony stretching from Costa Rica to Chiapas in Mexico. Two devastating earthquakes – in 1717 and 1773 – persuaded the colonial authorities that the Panchoy Valley in the central Highlands, where Antigua is located, was less than ideal. Guatemala City, the country's present-day capital, was founded in 1775, 36km to the west.

Three volcanoes loom over Antigua: the inactive Volcán de Agua to the south; the twin summits of the active Volcán de Fuego-Acatenango massif to the west. Volcán Pacaya, also active – and a popular climb – is 35km south-east

The man-made city is almost as wonderful as its natural setting. After losing capital status, it evolved slowly and no major earthquakes tore it apart. Today, Antigua is a medium-sized tidy city of ochre,

terracotta, blue and lilac-painted single-storey houses laid out on a classic Spanish grid. Buildings of two storeys or more tend to be churches, convents or monasteries. UNESCO, which listed the city as a World Heritage site in 1979, highlighted 'the physical integrity of most of [Antigua's] built heritage. The abandonment of the area by most of its population permitted the preservation of many of its monumental Baroque-style buildings as ruins'.

## **✈** At the airport

There are no direct flights from the UK to La Aurora International Airport (30km east of Antigua) but there are connections via US hubs or Madrid. Guatemala-Madrid flights take around 11.5 hours.

British citizens do not require visas to visit Guatemala. On arrival, passports are stamped, permitting a maximum stay of three months in Central America – if you cross to neighbouring countries and then re-cross you won't get another

three months. Customs and immigration tends to be quick at this quiet airport.

## **🚌** Getting into town

Tour operators will usually arrange minibuses or taxis from the airport to Antigua (around two hours). There are also regular shuttlebus transfers from US\$15 (£9; see [transportguatemala.com](http://transportguatemala.com)).

Budget watchers can take one of the refurbished US school buses, called *camionetas* (chicken buses), waiting outside the airport. These are alarmingly fast and charge as little as US\$2 for the transfer.

## **🚆** Other ways to arrive

Arriving in Antigua overland from other parts of Guatemala or El Salvador, Mexico or Belize is easy to organise. The city is a major transport hub and an established stop on the gringo trail. Some chicken buses drop off outside the historic centre, in which case you will have a short walk. ►



## ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

### ■ Essential Info

**Population:** 34,685

**Language:** Spanish, Mayan languages

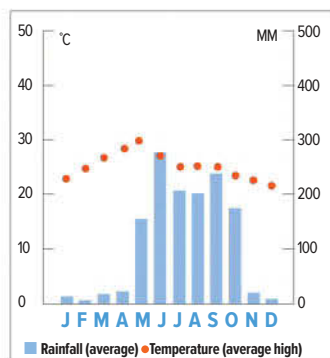
**Timezone:** GMT-6

**International dialling code:** +502

**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals

**Highest viewpoint:** Climb 3,670m Volcán de Agua for a great view; walk or catch a tuk-tuk to Cerro de la Cruz, just north of the city.

**Health issues:** There are no mosquitos and few bugs in the Guatemalan Highlands. Don't drink the tap water.



Be aware of the signs of altitude sickness – it can creep up on you.

**Recommended guidebooks:** *Moon Handbooks Guatemala* (Avalon, 2012); *Focus Guatemala* (Footprint, 2011); *Guatemala* (Lonely Planet, 2013)

**Web resources:** aroundantigua.com; visitguatemala.com

**Climate:** Late-Nov to May is dry season; peak tourist time is Christmas to Easter. From June to Nov there is rainfall most days but downpours are usually short if intense.

### TOP TIP

Antigua is eminently walkable. Don't over-plan your visit – allow time to wander its edges and see the local churches, assorted ruins and the coffee plantations in the suburbs.

### ■ First Day's Tour

Head for the **plaza** – the historic and social heart of Antigua. There are some excellent café-bars on the west side (El Portal has the best coffee). On the east side is the **San José cathedral** (left); on the north is Museo del Libro Antiguo, a small museum dedicated to the arrival of printing in colonial Guatemala.

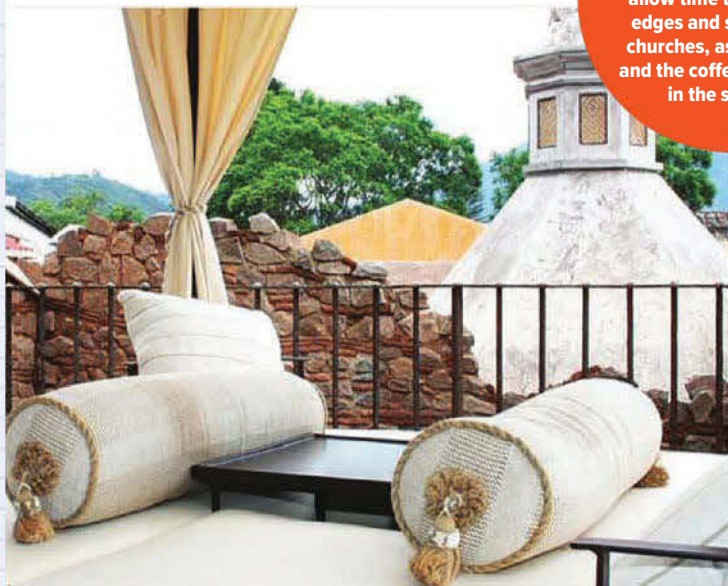
Antigua is packed with tourist tat. To see/buy quality crafts and antiques, pop into the **Casa de Artes** (4 Avenida Sur 11), which has an excellent collection of ceremonial masks, textiles and majolica ceramics. Round off an arty morning at **La Antigua Galería de Arte** (4a Calle Oriente 15), which has a good collection of contemporary Latin American art.

For lunch, there's great pizza and ice-cold beers at Argentine-run **Angie** (1a Avenida Sur 11). To keep it cheap and local, head to the market (five blocks west of the plaza) for soups and chicken-and-chips – aim for the busiest stalls.



Next, take the chocolate-making class at the **Choco Museo** (US\$24; daily 11am, 1.30pm, 4pm; chocomuseo.com) – great fun and very informative.

For a glass of wine, try **Almacen Troccoli** (Calle del Arc 34), a beautifully converted ironmongers. For Guatemalan cuisine, **La Cueva de los Urquizú** (2a Calle Oriente 9D) does a good self-service buffet of tamales, stews, salads, guacamole, tortillas and sausages.



### ■ Where to Stay

**Top end:** With its beautiful stonework, peaceful courtyards, good restaurant, library and rooftop bar, El Convento (2a Avenida Norte 11; elconventoantigua.com, above) is a sophisticated 26-suite boutique hotel close to all the main attractions. Doubles from £140 [\$231] incl tax.

**Mid range:** Twenty minutes' walk outside town in the Calvario area, Villa Colonial is part of a small Guatemalan chain (villasdeguatemala.com) and is

popular with weekenders. It's not in fact colonial, but the architecture cleverly apes the Spanish baroque church next door. Doubles from £55 [\$90], incl breakfast and tax.

**Budget:** El Hostal (1ra Avenida Sur 8; elhostal.hostel.com) is a popular backpacker hotel in a colonial-era house not far from the main plaza. Rooms are clean and cosy and there's a leafy courtyard where travellers mix. Dormitory beds from £7; doubles from £11.

### ■ Stay or Go

Antigua merits at least three days but you'll need five if you plan to scale one of the volcanoes. Then, it's easy to move on.

Two hours' by bus to the west is **Lago de Atitlán**, ideal for hiking, cycling and kayaking; it also provides an opportunity to see something of indigenous Guatemala, whether in the company of the Quiché, Kaqchikel or Tz'utujil-speaking communities (see page 26). **Chichicastenango**, also in

the Highlands, is the place to shop for handicrafts or taste the food of the Quiché Maya (market days: Thursday and Sunday).

**Tikal** – one of the largest lowland Maya sites, hidden in the Petén rainforest (above) – is an 11-12 hour bus ride away (or a one-hour flight from La Aurora). Southern Belize, El Salvador and the Mayan site at Copán in Honduras are all half a day's bus ride from Antigua. **W**





# Eiffel Tower, Paris

The soaring iron latticework of the Eiffel Tower has loomed over Paris since the World Fair of 1889 – now, 125 years on, it remains France's most iconic structure

## Get orientated

'I ought to be jealous of the tower; she is more famous than I am.' So spoke Gustave Eiffel, the civil engineer whose company designed France's most iconic pylon. And who can blame him for morphing into the green-eyed monster? Shooting up to 324m high, the majestic Tour Eiffel has usurped its creator, becoming the ultimate architectural symbol of romance, not to mention one of the greatest and most enduring engineering feats of the 19th century.

Built as the centrepiece of the 1889 World Fair, to mark the centenary of the French Revolution, the tower was supposed to represent, according to Eiffel, 'the century of industry and science in which we are living'. It was also meant to be a temporary structure, due for demolition in 1909. But, 125 years since its first erection, the Tour Eiffel still dominates the Parisian skyline, and remains the emblem of the city.

## Getting there

Many airlines fly from regional UK airports to Paris. For example, easyJet flies from Luton, Gatwick, Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow and Belfast to Paris Charles de Gaulle; flights from Luton cost from around £32 one way and take around 75 minutes ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)).

Alternatively, take the train. Eurostar services from London St Pancras to Paris Gare du Nord take around two hours and 15 minutes, and cost from £69pp return ([www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)).

The tower is to the west of the city centre and can be reached by Metro and bus. Tickets can be bought online ([www.ratp.fr](http://www.ratp.fr)) or directly from the bus/train station; singles cost €1.70, and passes are also available. If travelling by Metro, disembark at Bir-Hakeim station (Line 6), a short stroll from the tower, or Trocadéro (Line 9), on the opposite side of the River Seine. Buses 82 and 42 stop close to the tower.

You can also reach the Tour Eiffel by boat. Batobuses run along the Seine; as well as the tower, stops include the Louvre and Notre Dame. A one-day pass costs €15 ([www.batobus.com](http://www.batobus.com)).

## The visit

You can stare at the tower's façade for free. To ascend it comes at a price: €5 to climb the stairs to floor two; €9 to take the lift to it; €15 to ride the lift to the very top. Beat the crowds by booking tickets in advance online (at least the day before); this enables you to join a fast-track queue.

The new Le 58 Tour Eiffel restaurant is on the first floor. Alain Ducasse's swanky Jules Verne restaurant is on level two. At the very top there's a hatch serving pricy champagne; here, you can also explore Gustave Eiffel's office.

Of course, it's really all about the view: you can see the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, Sacré Coeur and more. Visit [www.tour-eiffel.fr](http://www.tour-eiffel.fr). ►





## Eiffel Tower

Once the world's tallest man-made structure (until New York's Chrysler Building stole its thunder in 1930), the Eiffel Tower was also once the subject of fierce debate. Even before its completion, the sky-high landmark was controversially branded a 'truly tragic street lamp' and a monstrosity that was 'confused and deformed' by the artists of the era. And then there were the non-believers, who didn't even think such a building could be completed. How wrong they were. These days, around seven million people visit the tower every year.

### ◆ Jules Verne restaurant

Rated highly in Paris, offering not only superb food, but a breathtaking panoramic view.



### ◆ Cineiffel

This small audio-visual museum shows historical film footage of the tower.



### ◆ Eiffel Bust

The achievement of Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923) was honoured by sculptor Antoine Bourdelle in 1929. The bust is at the corner of the north pillar.

### ◆ Double-decker lifts

These have a limited capacity; during peak tourist season there can be long queues – which require patience and a good head for heights.

### ◆ Third Floor

At 276m above the ground, it can hold 800 people at a time.



### ◆ Viewing Gallery

On a clear day it is possible to see for over 70km; you might even glimpse Chartres Cathedral.

### ◆ Daring feats

The tower has always inspired crazy stunts. In 1912, Franz Reichelt, a Parisian tailor, attempted to fly from the parapet with only a cape for wings. He plunged to his death in front of a large crowd.



### ◆ Second Floor

Located at a height of 115m, it is separated from the first level by 359 steps.

### ◆ First Floor

At 57m, the first level can be reached by lift or 360 steps. There is a post office here as well as Le 58 restaurant and a souvenir shop.

### ◆ Construction

It took 300 steel workers two years to build the tower, which comprises 15,000 iron pieces and 2.5 million rivets.



### ■ Essentials

**Language:** French  
**Time:** GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)  
**Visas:** Not required by UK nationals  
**Money:** Euro (€), currently €1.20 to the UK£  
**Health:** Brits holding a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) are covered for emergency healthcare; however, you should still take out comprehensive travel insurance.

This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness France* guide (£17.99), the best visual guide to the country. [www.travel.dk.com](http://www.travel.dk.com)



### Walking up the Eiffel Tower

Conquering the tower on foot is not for the faint-hearted. There are 1,665 steps up to the very top, although only the 704 leading to the second floor are open to the public. Still, that's plenty enough to push your thighs and calves to the brink, not to mention test your stomach for heights. Fortunately, you can walk at your own pace, and the hard work is worth it when you breeze past the crowds queuing for the more popular lift option. If you're not feeling so fit, you can always ride the lift up, then take the stairs back down – a more relaxing walk, but every bit as breathtaking.



**Prime place**  
George Square,  
laid out in 1781,  
is Glasgow's civic centre



# Glasgow, Scotland

The Commonwealth Games is the latest gold medal to be awarded to Glasgow.  
**Helen Ochyra** takes in the art, sport and greenery of this rejuvenated city

Everyone is talking about Glasgow – and for once this is a good thing. For years the city was down at heel, an ex-industrial wasteland known more for its social problems than for its tourist attractions. But in 2014 Glasgow is *the* place to be, sitting pretty at the top of every ‘places to visit this year’ list and a non-negotiable fixture in many a travel itinerary thanks to the summer’s Commonwealth Games.

Running from 23 July until 3 August, the Games will bring with them thousands of domestic and international visitors, not to mention the rash of new sports venues, hotels and restaurants already built. The city has been preparing itself to take centre stage for some time. In fact, ever since 1990, when Glasgow was named European City of Culture (now European Capital of Culture), this much-maligned Scottish hub has been on the up.

It happened quietly at first: a regeneration of the inner city, a clean up of the Clyde, a stealthy increase in the number of businesses. Then museums opened, residents returned to the city centre, and the Glasgow’s Miles Better campaign highlighted the famed friendliness of the people. By the time the city was awarded the Commonwealth Games in November 2007 it came as no surprise.

And today, Glasgow *is* ready. Dynamic, creative and ultra-friendly, this is a city with much to offer. There are museums and galleries with world-leading collections, independent boutiques selling one-off fashions, and jaw-dropping buildings designed by everyone from Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Zaha Hadid. Walk streets lined with grand Victorian buildings, drink freshly brewed coffee in sweeping squares and romp through rolling parkland just minutes from the city centre.

By night, take a table at one of the city’s contemporary restaurants and indulge in Scotland’s larder – fresh oysters, thick steaks, juicy scallops – before taking the city’s pulse with a visit to one of its stellar live music venues.

Then, of course, there are the Commonwealth Games themselves. Over 12 days, 17 different sports will be contested at 14 different venues. From rugby at the Ibrox Stadium to track and field at Hampden Park, gymnastics at the SSE Hydro and cycling at the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, the city will be alive with sport, not to mention the cultural programme that runs alongside it.

But Glasgow’s best secret remains just how close it is to the Highlands. For a change of scenery, you can take a 30-minute drive out of the city to Loch Lomond, and get your boots muddy on the West Highland Way or take in the rolling views from Inchcailloch island. ►



## ◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

### ■ Essential Info

**When to go:** Year round. The Commonwealth Games run from 23 July to 3 August 2014.

**Getting there:** Virgin trains (virgintrains.co.uk) serves Glasgow Central hourly from London Euston, via stops such as Crewe and Lancaster; returns from Euston cost from £60. British Airways (ba.com) flies to Glasgow International from Heathrow, Gatwick and City, from £74 return. The Glasgow Shuttle bus links the airport and the city; £8.50 return.

**Getting around:** Glasgow is a compact city and many of its key attractions are within walking distance of each other. Local buses serve the wider city; a FirstDay ticket offers unlimited journeys for £4. A taxi from the city centre to Finnieston will cost around £5.

**Where to stay:** Radisson Blu (301 Argyle St; 0141 204 3333, radissonblu.co.uk) has an unbeatable location by Queen Street station, stylish doubles and a lovely swimming pool. Rooms from £129pn.

Boutique Citizen M (60 Renfrew St; 0203 519 1111, citizenm.com) has chic, modern if small rooms; from £65pn.



**Where to eat:** Glasgow's dining scene is booming, with a clutch of outstanding new restaurants having opened recently. Head to Finnieston's Crabshakk (*above*; 0141 334 6127, crabshakk.com) for succulent seafood. Or try Butchershop (0141 339 2999, butchershopglasgow.com) for perfectly cooked steaks of all cuts and sizes, with views overlooking Kelvingrove.

**Further info:** peoplemakeglasgow.com

### Day 1 ART ATTACK

Start by following the footsteps (or rather brushstrokes) of one of Glasgow's most famous sons, architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. There is no better way to admire his art nouveau work than by taking a tour of the **Glasgow School of Art** on Renfrew Street (*right*); three tours daily; £9.75; gsa.ac.uk. Admire what is arguably the world's first Modernist building (completed 1899), before taking the short walk to the **Willow Tea Rooms** (willowtearooms.co.uk). This traditional Scottish tearoom was designed by Mackintosh in 1904; he chose everything from the windows to the waitresses' outfits. Drink in his elegant style along with a loose-leaf tea.

Next, stroll east to **Merchant City** (merchantcityglasgow.com), where the elegant sandstone buildings nod to the city's successful industrial past. This area was once home to tobacco lords and cotton kings; today it is the haunt of Glasgow's new wave of exporters – the designers, artists and musicians who work in Glasgow's creative industries.



Explore the art galleries and boutiques around **George Square** before ducking into the **Gallery of Modern Art** (or GoMA) on Royal Exchange Square. Housed in a neoclassical building this free museum features works by Hockney, Warhol and Scottish artists John Bellamy and Ken Currie. Just outside, check to see if the **Duke of Wellington statue** has its usual traffic cone hat, an unofficial addition that is said to represent the city's light-hearted attitude to authority.

End your first day with a wee dram (or two) in one of Merchant City's many excellent bars.

### TOP TIP

For a night out, eschew the city centre in favour of **Finnieston**. Here, **Argyle Street** is packed with friendly indie restaurants and bars – try the **Finnieston Bar** or newcomer **One of a Kind**.



### Day 2 WESTWARD HO!

Blow the cobwebs away this morning with a walk in **Kelvingrove Park**, an 85-acre green space straddling the River Kelvin in the city's West End. This side of the city has emerged as the go-to destination for everything from art and culture to food and fashion, so plan to spend the day in this area.

Allow at least two hours to explore the **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum** (free). There's more Mackintosh here: the Mackintosh and the Glasgow Style gallery is dedicated to his graphic and decorative work. There's an astonishingly wide selection of other exhibits (more than 8,000), ranging from Salvador Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross* to the RL Scott bequest, once one of the finest private

collections of European arms and armour in the world.

From here walk south into up-and-coming **Finnieston**. This was once the destination of choice for dockworkers seeking unsavoury entertainments but today has been revitalised by the brand new **SSE Hydro** arena (*above*) and an influx of designers and foodies attracted by the low rents and the community feel. Spend your time strolling along **The Strip**, poking your head into boutiques and bars and selecting whatever takes your fancy, whether that be cocktails in a window-side booth at **Kelvingrove Café** or a fish-and-chip supper at **Old Salty's**. Quality here is high – and there's not a deep-fried Mars bar in sight.

### Day 3 GO GREEN

Although Glasgow is Scotland's largest urban area, it is also home to more than 90 parks and gardens. In fact, the city is said to have more green spaces per capita than any other in Europe.

Get out and explore some of these today, starting at **Pollok Park** (*above*), 5km south of the city centre. At 360 acres, this park is the city's biggest, so opt for a horse and cart ride to take in its vast scale. Stop off at the Category B-listed walled garden to see plants relocated from the Himalaya, and don't miss a visit to the fold of Highland cattle – the most accessible herd in Scotland.

Slightly further afield (a 30-minute drive) is **Loch Lomond**, the largest inland stretch of water in Britain.

You could spend several days exploring it, but one day is enough for the highlights. One of these is **Inchcailloch**, the largest island in the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve and reached by waterbus service from the small village of **Balmaha**, on the loch's eastern shore. This is a lovely place for a walk: the **West Highland Way** runs through here and from the village you can make the challenging climb up Conic Hill, with the path up and over its summit (part of the Highland Boundary Fault) offering views south over the rolling Lowlands and north into the Highlands. Recuperate with hearty traditional meal and a pint of local ale at Balmaha's **Oak Tree Inn**. **W**





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## WANDERLUST TRAVEL MEDIA Website Editor

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You will be responsible for:

- Creating, sourcing, planning and scheduling content for the *Wanderlust* website.
- Our social media accounts – Facebook, Twitter, any others – and e-newsletters
- Competition admin
- Help shape the editorial direction and overall strategy for the *Wanderlust* site to meet its traffic and commercial targets
- Help to promote the *Wanderlust* brand throughout the website
- Engage with and drive engagement from our online community, myWanderlust

### PERSONAL QUALITIES:

- Well organised and well motivated
- Good eye for top content and detail
- Good commercial head – looking to maximise website revenue.
- Analytical and dynamic – needs to be

able to see what is/isn't working and to tune content to maximise traffic.

- Dynamic – always coming up with ideas for content or features for the website and for traffic driving ideas

### ESSENTIAL SKILLS:

- Experience of copy writing, sub-editing and proof-reading
- Knowledge of SEO best practices
- Experience of an Analytics package such as Google Analytics
- Experience of CMS systems
- Basic Photoshop skills
- Basic HTML coding skills

### HOW TO APPLY:

Please send the following to [website@wanderlust.co.uk](mailto:website@wanderlust.co.uk). **This is a full time role based in our Windsor (UK) office.**

- CV and covering letter/e-mail
- Salary expectations
- Provide us with a brief analysis of who the *Wanderlust* audience is and how *Wanderlust* differs from other consumer travel media
- 3-5 points that you would improve about the *Wanderlust* website and why
- 3-5 ideas to generate further revenue from the *Wanderlust* website

**Closing date: 20/02/2014**

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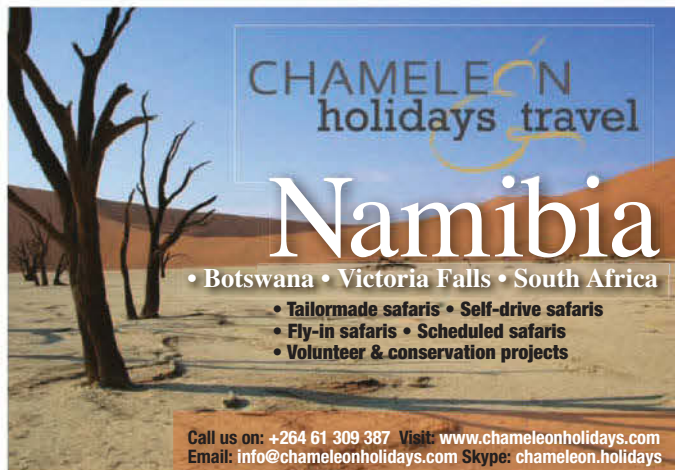
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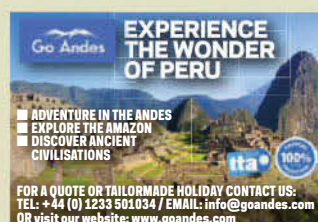
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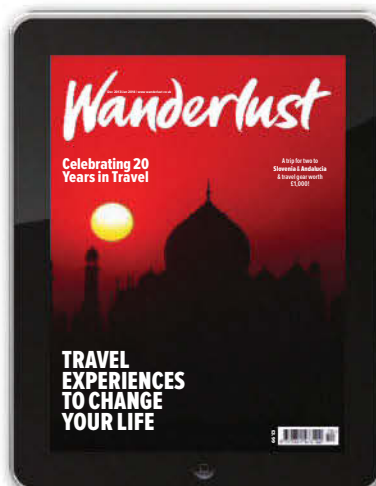
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■ Travel Company Tales



## G Adventures

**Bruce Poon Tip**

Founder of G Adventures, which celebrates its 25th birthday this year

### How did G Adventures get started?

I started G at the age of 22 after backpacking through Asia. I saw the opportunity to create a new kind of company, something the world had never seen. The travel landscape was different then and there weren't many options for people wanting to travel in an authentic and sustainable way.

As explained in my book, *Looptail: How One Company Changed the World by Reinventing Business*, I saw the opportunity to build a company that offered unique, small-group travel experiences. When I couldn't secure finance, I maxed out two credit cards to start G and I haven't looked back. We now have nearly 2,000 employees in 100+ countries and served more than 150,000 travellers last year.

### What were the early challenges?

The global reach of our business. We were a very small group in Toronto that had to convince a global audience to pick us. We had to build a brand that

differentiated us beyond our product. The idea of exporting tourism on the level we were attempting was new. We created a brand promise that transcended what we do, engaging people to a higher purpose. Eventually, the internet broke down many of these barriers for us, but in the early days, we spent a lot of time convincing people that our company did things differently.

### What makes G Adventures unique?

We go to great lengths to get the right people on board. There is a glass ceiling on how well one can deliver a trip to Machu Picchu or the Great Pyramid of Giza. We seek people who are passionate about what we are trying to accomplish. Our culture is our brand and our people are at the centre. We want people who love what we do and stand behind it.

### Future plans?

We want to continue to change the world through travel and create happiness through the innovative ways we show our beautiful planet. Whether it's by providing incredible experiences around the world, or by giving back to the communities we visit.

Through our NGO, Planeterra, we build sustainable solutions to help preserve cultural traditions, improve the health of locals, create job opportunities, and a better standard of life. We love changing people's lives! Wrap that around the best customer service and you can expect pretty big things from us in the future.

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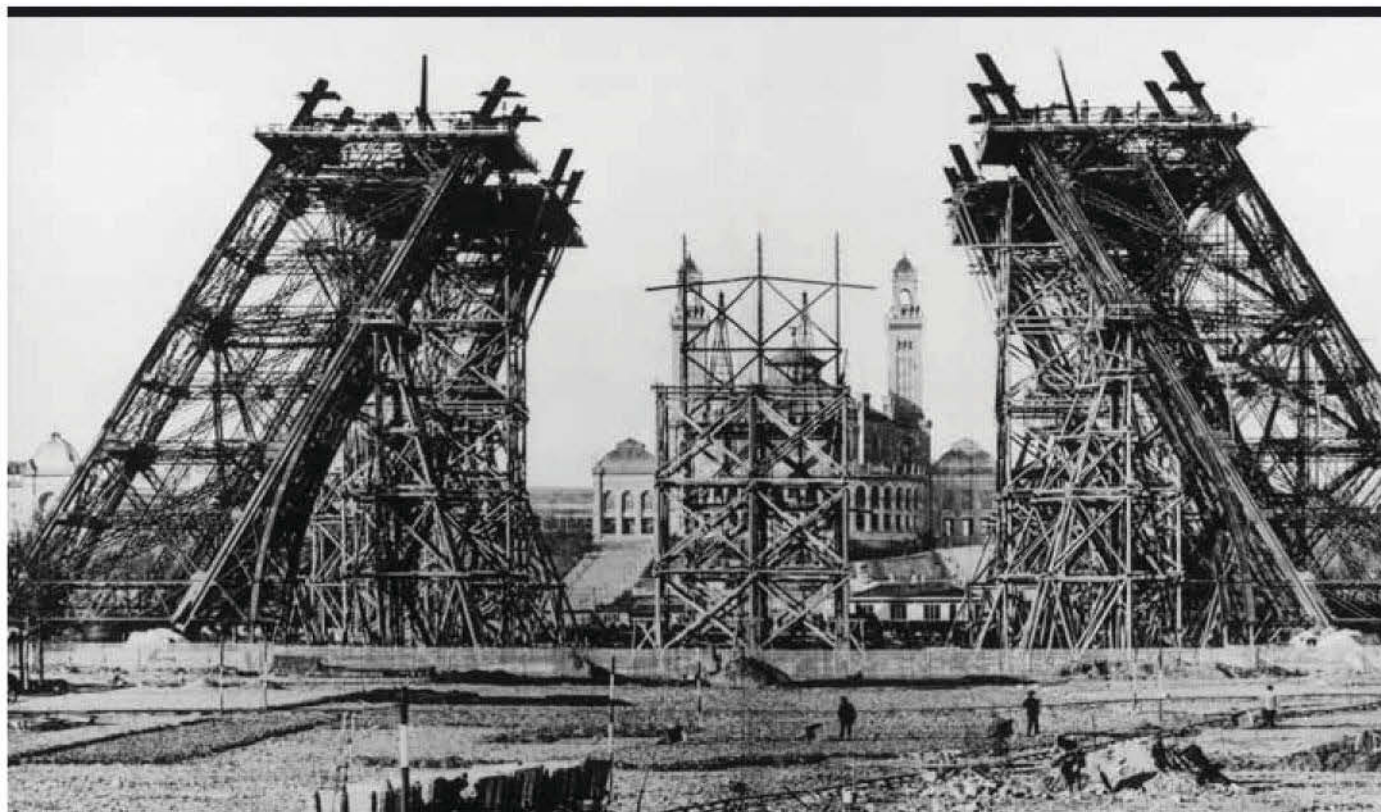
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# Building an icon, Paris

Practically the entire Parisian art scene lobbied against the Eiffel Tower: men such as Dumas, Zola and Maupassant declared it 'useless and monstrous'. Which makes it all the more fascinating that, 125 years after its construction, it's become one of the most iconic structures on the planet. Bet those artists would feel silly now. *Turn back to p135 to plan your visit.*





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